

# 1

## Judaism

*Eliezer Segal*

The term *Judaism*, which implies a definable belief-system, has no real equivalent in the traditional vocabulary of the religion itself. Its widespread use in European languages owes largely to the encounter with Christianity, which attaches greater importance to creeds and doctrines. In Jewish tradition, theology and religious concepts rarely have been perceived as defining features.

It is more accurate to employ the term *Judaism* in a broader cultural sense to denote the full range of religious expressions of the people of Israel (as they almost invariably have referred to themselves). This usage correctly underscores the national character of the religion, inextricably bound to historical experience, without attaching disproportionate weight to its theological component. As we shall observe, Judaism contains a complex variety of elements, including law, ethics, morality, observances, worship, and beliefs.

Technically, the word *Judaism*—like its cognate terms *Jew* and *Jewish*—refers to a more narrowly defined time frame within the longer national history, commencing at the conclusion of the biblical era. Whereas earlier epochs had known of twelve tribes of Israel, or of the two rival monarchies of Judah and Israel, a sequence of conquests and exiles brought about a situation in

which only a vestige of the original people, dominated by the ancient tribe of Judah and inhabiting its ancestral territory (Judaea), was able to maintain its religious and cultural identity through subsequent generations. In some recent scholarship and theological writing it has become common to restrict the use of *Judaism* to those manifestations that emerged after the Babylonian exile, as distinct from earlier *Israelite* or *Hebrew* religion. We must take care not to construe this terminological preference as an assertion that the Judaism of the Second Temple era (see below) was a new and original invention, unconnected to the religion of the Hebrew scriptures.

If indeed there is a term from Judaism's own conceptual vocabulary that can serve as a meaningful alternative to *Judaism*, it is undoubtedly *Torah*. From its basic connotations of "teaching" or "guidance," Torah came to be equated with the scriptures that were revealed by God to Israel through the agency of Moses, the greatest of God's messengers or *prophets*. The text of this revelation was written down in the volumes that Jews refer to as the Torah, usually designated in English as "the Five Books of Moses" (reflecting the old Greek term *Pentateuch*). Although the Torah consists largely of laws and observances, it contains other elements, particularly a historical narrative. The Torah of Moses is the most sacred and authoritative component of the Jewish scriptures, which also include two other sections: the "Prophets" [Hebrew: *Nevi'im*] and the "[Sacred] Writings" [Hebrew: *Ketuvim*; Greek: *Hagiographa*]. Taken together, the Jewish scriptures are usually referred to as the Hebrew Bible; Christians designate them the Old Testament (OT).

According to the view that would eventually become normative in Judaism, the five books of the Written Torah were paralleled by an oral revelation that is an equally authentic and holy part of the divine revelation to Moses. Though the earliest mentions of the Oral Torah referred to venerable ancestral traditions that had been transmitted over the generations, the concept of Oral Torah evolved to encompass additional aspects of religious lore, including the enactments and teachings ascribed to the sages of various generations, interpretations of biblical precepts, and so forth. Thus, in its broader and dynamic meaning, the word

*Torah* can refer to the rich spectrum of Jewish religious traditions as they evolved through the ages. The delicate interplay of Oral and Written Torahs will be very much in evidence when we attempt to trace the evolution of Jewish conceptions of the afterlife.

Judaism's characteristic subordination of creed to practice allowed for a surprising range of theological expression over the ages, frequently in response to foreign stimuli. In keeping with the evolving, historical character of Jewish religion, we shall divide our treatment of the topic into several chronological stages.

#### THE FIRST COMMONWEALTH (until ca. 539 B.C.E.)<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the Hebrew Bible, apart from its latest strata, did not teach that individuals survive death in any religiously significant way. Although there are several terms and passages in the Hebrew scriptures that could allude to some sort of afterlife conception, and others that would be creatively interpreted in that vein by Jews of later generations, their place in the broader context of biblical world views is negligible.

Take, for example, the words of those classical prophets who devoted their lives to instilling in their contemporaries a zeal for God and the Torah. If they had anticipated that the dead would be judged in a future world, or that their spiritual immortality was contingent upon their religious and moral conduct in their present lives, then it is inconceivable why this argument is absent from their impassioned preaching. Neither is one's destiny in the afterlife cited as a reason for sacrificial atonement or to explain the necessity for cleansing oneself of sins and impurities. Several passages in the Torah present ghastly lists of curses that will befall the Israelites should they fail to hearken unto God's word. Among these stark descriptions of the consequences of disobedience, we read about plagues and fevers, defeat and conquest, famine, desolation, and exile. Yet nowhere do we encounter any mention of the fate that awaits the sinners upon conclusion of their days on earth. Even when the Torah is emphasizing

that God's grace or wrath will continue beyond a person's life span, it does so by extending it to one's progeny. For better or for worse, it was believed that immortality would be achieved through the continuity of future generations rather than in a supernatural afterlife.

Alongside these eloquent arguments from silence, we must acknowledge that there are texts in the Hebrew Bible that give a different impression, that seem to refer to at least a limited kind of afterlife. In the following pages we shall survey some of the principal pieces of evidence that have been adduced by scholars.

The Bible frequently speaks of deceased persons being "gathered unto their fathers" or "sleeping with their fathers." The expressions evoke a picture of the dead ancestors existing in some state, awaiting reunification with their recently deceased descendants. However, they could mean no more than "they followed their forefathers into death and the grave."

Another common biblical expression for death is to "go down to *she'ol*." It has become almost universal to render the term as "the underworld," or even as "hell," and to describe it as a shadowy place of disembodied spirits, similar to the Greek conception of Hades.

When we examine the actual passages in which the word *she'ol* appears, we find few, if any, that cannot plausibly be understood simply as "pit" or (by extension) "grave," which became a figurative equivalent for death. In some passages *she'ol* refers to underground realms that have no associations with death. Even those texts that present *she'ol* as a frightening fate in store for the wicked do not necessarily imply more than that the sinners will bring upon themselves an early death.<sup>2</sup> Early scholarly attempts to identify an etymological link with an Assyrian term for the abode of dead spirits have proven to be spurious, based on preconceived ideas and extratextual considerations.<sup>3</sup>

The most compelling proof for biblical belief in survival after death is the disturbing tale, related in 1 Samuel 28, of how the desperate King Saul clandestinely visited the "witch of Endor," who called up the departed spirit of the prophet Samuel. If we accept the story at face value, then the ghostly spirit of the prophet

Samuel lingered on in a restful state until his repose was disturbed by the terrified Israelite monarch. It is not entirely clear from the narrative whether Samuel was aware of the events that had been troubling Saul or if he was merely drawing conclusions based on the information supplied by Saul and his own memory of God's hostility toward the king.

Several details raise doubts about the narrator's perspective on the episode. The fact that Saul himself did not behold the prophet but relied on the witch's description suggests that she might have staged a hoax for his benefit, although the wording implies that it was Samuel who spoke the words that Saul heard. Some have preferred to construe the whole apparition as a vision manufactured by God for the occasion. Nevertheless, it is probable that the story's author truly believed that deceased souls linger on in a state of repose, subject to disturbances by necromancers and other mortal nuisances.

Even if the raising up of Saul at Endor does testify to a widespread belief in the survival of human ghosts, it is clear that that belief did not occupy a central place in the Bible's religious consciousness. As Yehezkel Kaufmann characterizes the situation: "That the spirit of the deceased lives on apart from the body is the belief of the people, but biblical faith draws no religious or moral inferences from this notion."<sup>4</sup> The afterlife is at most a fact of nature that carries no visible implications as regards one's moral or religious behavior. Death will not bring the individual closer to God, nor will the afterlife be the setting for eternal rewards or punishments. Neither the ritual nor the moral precepts of the Torah are commanded with a view to preparing people for life in the hereafter.

Most modern historical scholarship has assumed that the Israelite popular religion postulated a more tangible and active survival of the soul in an underworld. This view is usually supported by citing cultural comparisons with neighboring peoples, archeological remnants of local burial practices, and by noting the vehemence with which necromancy was condemned by the Torah. If these beliefs were so prevalent among the common people, then it is remarkable that they receive so little mention in the Bible. Scholars have generally ascribed this fact to a con-

scious policy of the biblical redactors, the formulators of the “official” religion of Israel, who emphasized the absolute value of life in the present world and insisted that people (themselves or their descendants) would receive earthly retribution for their deeds.<sup>5</sup> The most reasonable explanation for this antagonism to afterlife ideas appears to be Kaufmann’s, that afterlife conceptions in the ancient Near East were invariably connected with deification of the deceased or of the rulers of the underworld, and hence were perceived as inherently antithetical to the prophetic ideal of monotheism.

### BABYLONIAN EXILE AND SECOND COMMONWEALTH (539 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.)<sup>6</sup>

The stability of the First Commonwealth gave way to turmoil and national disaster. First the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians and sent to an exile from which they would never be regathered. Afterward, Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian armies invaded Judea, destroying Solomon’s Temple and deporting the population. However, when Babylonia fell to Persia, a remnant of the Judeans responded to the call of the Persian emperor Cyrus to return to Jerusalem, rebuild their Temple, and resume their cultural and religious life.

The harsh realities of everyday life would gradually have eroded people’s confidence in seeing justice in this world. The terrible national catastrophes made it even harder to accept the claim that history provides satisfactory retribution for the righteous and the wicked. In contrast to the earlier belief in transgenerational corporate responsibility, a new sense of individual accountability was voiced by post-Exilic prophets. Jeremiah and Ezekiel asserted that individuals are judged only for their own iniquities, not for those of their ancestors. Probably around this time the author of the Book of Job struggled with the issue of the undeserved suffering of the righteous, rejecting facile apologetics but ultimately unable to penetrate God’s inscrutable ways. Although the literary remains of the Exilic and early Second Commonwealth cras attest to a questioning of the

traditional rationales, the writers of this era did not propose that life’s inequities would be rectified in the hereafter.<sup>7</sup>

We possess almost no records of Jewish religious thought during the Persian period, from the early days of the Second Commonwealth through to the encounter with Hellenism in the late fourth century B.C.E. However, as soon as we emerge from this historical “dark age” it becomes evident that one particular conception of the afterlife had become widespread in Jewish circles: the belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead. The origins of this idea are shrouded in obscurity. Most historians believe that the notions of resurrection and judgment in the afterlife were imported into Judaism from Persian Zoroastrianism.<sup>8</sup> Although later generations would trace the idea back to Ezekiel’s symbolic vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones (37:1–14), where the revival of lifeless skeletons symbolized the miraculous redemption of the scattered and dispirited Jewish nation, the passage furnishes evidence that belief in individual resurrection was not widely held, for when God asks Ezekiel “Can these bones live?” the prophet is unable to give a lucid answer—hardly the appropriate response if resurrection were the normative belief.

Jewish texts from the early second century onward, including works that are not normally perceived as emanating from narrow sectarian circles, speak of resurrection as the ultimate fate of the deceased. The Book of Daniel, composed in the shadow of the persecutions of Antiochos IV Epiphanes (ca. 165), promises that “many of them that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2–3). The author of 2 Maccabees, which recounts the successful Jewish revolt against the Hellenistic oppressors, tells of Jewish soldiers who contributed toward the purchase of sin-offerings on behalf of comrades who had died while still tainted by sin, commending them for “acting very finely and properly in taking account of the resurrection” (12:43–45). The long-winded justification of their action suggests that resurrection was still a controversial idea.

We can appreciate how a belief in an afterlife would satisfy a natural human craving for immortality and provide an effective incentive for martyrdom in times of persecution (Maccabees) or

a scenario for just and final retribution (Daniel). However, it is not immediately apparent why these authors should have opted for a conception of *bodily* survival rather than some form of *spiritual* immortality. We are probably justified in regarding its wide acceptance among Jews as a rejection of the prevalent Greek attitudes, which denigrated physical existence as being antithetical to humanity's proper rational vocation.<sup>9</sup> By insisting that even in death we will continue to inhabit physical bodies the proponents of resurrection were underscoring the inherent sanctity of material creation, in keeping with the attitudes of biblical religion. Furthermore, although the continuing existence of a soul or intellect can be perceived as a "natural" process independent of faith in a God (as in some modern parapsychological theories), it is impossible to imagine a *reversal* of nature, such as the reconstitution of decomposed flesh, except through miraculous divine intervention. Some scholars have argued that from its beginnings the teaching of bodily resurrection was intimately connected with its role in eschatological visions (see below).<sup>10</sup>

Sources emanating from the first century C.E.—including the historian Josephus Flavius, the Christian gospels, Jewish Rabbinic traditions—are in rare agreement when they depict the issue of afterlife conceptions as a pivotal topic of sectarian dispute among the three main Jewish "philosophies" of the late Second Commonwealth. In Josephus's famous accounts of the three Jewish parties we read that the Pharisees proclaimed the eternity of the soul, asserting that the dead are judged "under the earth." The righteous pass on to other bodies, while the wicked are condemned to eternal punishment or "imprisonment." In stating that the wicked are denied resurrection altogether, it is evident that Josephus's Pharisees are at variance with the author of Daniel, for whom judgment takes place *after* the resurrection. As for Josephus's apparent suggestion that we are dealing with *transmigration* or *reincarnation* (perhaps into an unborn body) rather than *resurrection* (to a reconstituted version of one's original body), most scholars believe that we should not attach too much weight to this detail, since Josephus frequently introduces formulations of this sort in order to conform to categories that were familiar to his Greek readership. The second major Jewish move-

ment, the priestly Sadducees, rejected all conceptions of survival after death or of retribution beyond the grave.

This dispute is consistent with the general characters of the two groups. The Sadducees, "fundamentalists" who acknowledged no religious authority outside the Bible, were continuing the biblical eschewal of afterlife conceptions. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were famous for their reverence for ancestral traditions that were passed down orally among the folk. The successors to the Pharisees during the Talmudic era would formulate a theology according to which such traditions had been revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (though the idea of resurrection had evidently achieved currency only since the Persian era).

Josephus's description of the third Jewish movement, the Essenes, equates their opinion with that of Greek philosophy, that the body is a prison-house that drags the soul down during a person's lifetime, until death provides a liberating release for the virtuous souls, who will dwell eternally in a paradise "beyond the ocean." As in the view ascribed to the Pharisees, the souls that prove unworthy of such a blessed destiny will be consigned to ceaseless torment. Since we possess no other explicit evidence of the Essene position on this question, we are unable to evaluate the accuracy of Josephus's description, though we might assume that he has again Hellenized his account. Significantly, there do not appear to be any texts among the Qumran documents (the "Dead Sea Scrolls" commonly attributed to the Essenes) that reflect such a view of the afterlife.<sup>11</sup>

Other texts from the Second Commonwealth present a complex assortment of attitudes towards human immortality and the afterlife. The pre-Maccabean Ben-Sira (Ecclesiasticus) maintained the conservative, Sadducee-like belief in death's finality. The Hellenized Philo of Alexandria extolled the immortality of the soul and mind, but not of the despised physical body. Apocalyptic authors offered graphic descriptions of the terrible retribution in store for God's enemies. Jesus of Nazareth defended the Pharisaic position (on his own terms, to be sure) against Sadducee antagonists, and his followers believed that Jesus himself underwent resurrection, though the early church was not always certain what implications to draw from this belief. Even

Josephus is not always consistent in distinguishing between bodily resurrection and survival of the soul, and whether such souls abide in "heaven" or under the earth.

#### TALMUDIC PERSPECTIVES (70 to ca. 700 C.E.)<sup>12</sup>

The Great Rebellion against Rome culminated in 70 C.E. with the destruction of Judaism's cherished sanctuary and the eradication of Jewish political autonomy. Of the sects that had fragmented Jewish religious life during the latter days of the Second Commonwealth, only the Pharisees appear to have survived the catastrophe, and many of their ideas now became features of a Jewish consensus. The religious teachings of the Jewish sages (now known as Rabbis) would eventually be compiled into several unwritten compendia of which the most prominent were the Mishnah, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, and numerous collections of biblical interpretation (Midrash), which could be either legal (*halakhic*) or homiletical (*aggadic*).

In spite of the Rabbis' usual reluctance to impose mandatory creeds, a passage in the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10:1) enumerates "one who denies the resurrection of the dead" among the heretics who forfeit their place in the world to come. The "world to come" was one of several new terms that were introduced in the Rabbinic discussions of the subject. A blessing praising God as "the reviver of the dead" was incorporated into the daily Jewish liturgy.

It is rare for Rabbinic theological ideas to be formulated systematically, and therefore their details must often be inferred from the homiletical or exegetical contexts in which they appear. Since Rabbinic literature was a collective enterprise, spanning some six centuries in both Babylonia and the Land of Israel, we cannot always assume that the diverse comments preserved in the literature are susceptible to harmonization. Of the topics that we shall survey in this section, some seem to result from serious reflection on the implications of the basic concepts; some were inspired by scriptural texts; others probably arose from homiletical motives, as incentives to virtuous

behavior; and still others were products of the unrestrained folk imagination.

Whatever ambivalence might have attached to Josephus's descriptions of the resurrection process, Rabbinic works are quite clear that the dead will be restored to their own bodies, not to unborn<sup>13</sup> or existing ones. Since observation tells us that this does not occur immediately after death, it was natural that the process should be projected to an unspecified future age. This led to the integration of resurrection into the complex array of Jewish beliefs about ultimate redemption and restoration under the leadership of the anointed Son of David, the Messiah. Bringing the dead back to life was perceived as a stage in the Jewish eschatological vision, one of the many wonders that would be performed in the redeemed world.<sup>14</sup>

Rabbinic sources often refer to the destination of the departed as the "World to Come," a term that usually referred to their state after the Messianic resurrection.<sup>15</sup> The question naturally arose of what befalls the souls between the moments of death and resurrection. A widespread notion held that the disembodied spirits continue to live on as individuals in a supernatural abode (see below), and several texts seem to apply the term "World to Come" to the place souls inhabit immediately after separation from their bodies.<sup>16</sup>

Without completely abandoning the biblical notions of divine retribution in this life, the Rabbis came to realize that neither the righteous nor the wicked receive full compensation in their lifetimes. The sense of dissatisfaction was heightened during the Hadrianic persecutions of 132-35, when Jews often suffered horrible martyrdom at the hands of the Romans precisely because they had maintained their devotion to their religion. Faith in divine justice demanded that a more equitable settling of accounts should await both the martyrs and their tormentors.<sup>17</sup>

The literature of the Second Commonwealth had dealt with similar questions, and no unified picture emerged of when and how the judgment would take place. We have already noted the discrepancy between Daniel and Josephus's Pharisees about whether the unrighteous will experience resurrection at all. Several texts from that period envisage some separation and pun-

ishment of the wicked, at least in a preliminary form, while in the grave.<sup>18</sup> The Mishnah, in denying heretics and sinners “a portion in the World to Come,” seems to reflect Josephus’s view, but our sources preserve a variety of approaches to the question.

In Rabbinic speculations about the fates of the righteous and sinners, the souls of the former inhabit the “Garden of Eden” whereas the latter suffer torments in “Gehenna.” In the Bible, the Garden of Eden had been an idyllic paradise from which the first woman and man had been expelled after disobeying God. Although some Rabbinic sources can be interpreted as referring to a terrestrial site, most seem to speak of a supernatural, “heavenly” paradise. The name Gehinom is usually traced to the “Vale [Hebrew: *Gei*] of Ben Hinom” south of Jerusalem, which had been a notorious site of a child-sacrifice cult during the First Commonwealth.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, the popular imagination supplied tangible graphic descriptions of both afterlife destinations. Much of the material now embodied in Rabbinic literature originated in sermons that were preached in the ancient synagogues, in which context vivid depictions of Paradise and Gehenna provide effective incentives for pursuing good and eschewing evil.

Although the elaborate Rabbinic beliefs about the afterlife strike us as departures from the biblical outlook summarized above, the Rabbis themselves acknowledged no discrepancies between scriptural religion and their own, and hence applied their exegetical skills (as embodied in the sophisticated methods of midrash) to uncovering afterlife references beneath the surfaces of the biblical verses. Interpretations of this sort were often stimulated by polemics with dissenting or heretical ideologies within Judaism or outside it.

The belief in physical resurrection carried practical implications with respect to the care of corpses. Because the physical remains will one day be restored to life, they may not be destroyed.<sup>20</sup> Therefore burial is the only sanctioned way of disposing of a corpse, and to arrange a proper burial was esteemed as a pious manifestation of the honor due to the dead.

Aside from the major themes outlined in the preceding paragraphs, Rabbinic literature is replete with whimsical speculations concerning every conceivable aspect of the hereafter. Is-

sues discussed in the pages of the Talmud and Midrash include: Are the dead cognizant of what goes on among mortals? Will people be resurrected naked or clothed? What will happen to those whose bodies were maimed and crippled?

#### MEDIEVAL JUDAISM (ca. 700 to ca. 1750 C.E.)

In many respects the Jewish “Middle Ages” were a continuation and consolidation of patterns that were established during the Talmudic era. However, two new interpretations of Judaism arose at this time, each with its own novel perspectives on the afterlife.

#### RATIONALISM<sup>21</sup>

Jews of Arab-speaking lands shared in the rediscovery of the Greek philosophical heritage that began when the Muslim conquerors of Syria were exposed to Syriac translations of Plato, Aristotle, and others. We shall confine ourselves here to a sampling of the more influential formulations of medieval Jewish rationalism.

A limited rationalistic influence can be discerned among “theologians” who invoked reason not as the ultimate arbiter of religious truth but only as an aid to maintaining order amid the disarray of the received tradition. In the Islamic world this theological endeavor was known as *Kalam*, a term modern scholars commonly extend to its Jewish equivalents.

A notable representative was the tenth-century Rabbi Saadia Ga'on.<sup>22</sup> In his *Book of Doctrines and Opinions* Saadia integrated the Rabbinic afterlife ideas into a broader constellation of theological issues, including the reasons for the creation of the universe and of humanity, free will and moral accountability, the nature of the soul, theodicy, good and evil. Saadia provided additional rational support for the received beliefs in the afterlife (which he inferred from the absence of divine justice in the present world) and resurrection. Like many rationalists, he interpreted the sensuous midrashic images of Paradise and Gehenna

as metaphors for spiritual states. Aware of the ambiguities in the Rabbinic uses of the term "World to Come," he opted for a metaphysical rather than an eschatological understanding, and argued that the initial resurrection in the Messianic era will include only Israel, whereas the righteous of all nations will be revived in the World to Come.

In the Greek tradition the prevailing model for immortality derived from the eternity of abstract ideas. The truths of logic and metaphysics, because they are immune from the corruptibility of physical matter, will persist for all time. Human beings can partake of eternity to the degree that they are capable of contemplating abstract verities. Medieval Jewish rationalists read that concept of impersonal immortality into the traditional Rabbinic imagery.

In the cosmology of the Jewish Aristotelians (as exemplified in the oeuvre of their most illustrious representative, the twelfth-century Egyptian scholar Moses Maimonides), a sequence of emanated "Separate Intelligences," pure disembodied intellects, occupies the continuum between God and our world, equated with the biblical angels and with the astronomical bodies that orbit the earth. The lowest of these, the "Active Intellect," is the power that imprints upon the human mind (initially only a "potential intellect") the capacity to conceptualize universal and abstract ideas that are not merely collections of sense-data. The influence of the Active Intellect on the human mind produces the "Acquired Intellect," which is the only part of the human being that remains immortal. Since this "immortality" is equated with participation in universal truth, the Jewish philosophers were not in agreement about whether people retain their individuality or are subsumed into a cosmic intellect.<sup>23</sup>

This conception is a far cry from the traditional biblical and Rabbinic ideas. It makes immortality contingent upon rational rather than moral perfection. At best, morality and observance of the Torah serve as a *means* for achieving the intellectual objectives by providing the material conditions for philosophizing or by disciplining the mind to resist the distractions of the "bodily appetites." Ultimately, however, it remains an elitist ideal, accessible only to those who possess the requisite intellectual gifts

and training. Some of the Jewish philosophers tried to mitigate these objections by observing that the Torah provides the most efficient pedagogic means for elevating large numbers of people to the appropriate intellectual levels. Maimonides's "Thirteen Articles of Creed" defined minimal levels of intellectual attainment that are accessible to the less sophisticated.

With their disdain for everything physical and corruptible the rationalists found themselves at odds with the traditional faith in the restoration of the physical body. Although Maimonides enumerated belief in resurrection among the mandatory Jewish dogmas, his sincerity was questioned by some contemporaries, and he composed a special treatise to confirm his commitment to the doctrine. However, it is evident that resurrection occupies, at most, an incidental place in Maimonides's eschatology: it will occur in the Messianic era, but the revived persons will die natural deaths and afterward enjoy true spiritual bliss in a non-physical World to Come.<sup>24</sup>

#### KABBALAH<sup>25</sup>

The medieval esoteric theosophy known as the Kabbalah was built upon a distinctive theory of ten divine creative powers known as *sefirot*, which serve as intermediaries between the unknowable God and the created world. Kabbalah combines speculative theology, a program of religious observance, and novel methods of biblical interpretation into a complex mystical restatement of traditional Judaism. The foremost literary creation of the Kabbalah was the *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor*, a pseudographic collection of homiletical discourses on the Bible believed to have been composed in the late thirteenth century by Rabbi Moses de Leon of Guadalajara, Spain. Some important Kabbalistic movements include the circle of Rabbi Isaac Luria in sixteenth-century Safed, and the Eastern European populist Hasidic movement which arose in the late eighteenth century.

The Kabbalists discerned at least three different components in the human soul.<sup>26</sup> This psychological theory allowed them to resolve some of the discrepancies between earlier afterlife con-

ceptions. Accordingly, it is only the lowliest, animal soul (*nefesh*) that endures punishment in the grave. The spirit (*ruah*) is eventually admitted to the "earthly Garden of Eden," whereas the immaculate soul (*neshamah*), originating in the supernal *sefirot* and in the universal soul of the primordial Adam, ultimately returns to its divine source in the "celestial Garden of Eden." In the more radical versions of the theory, the *neshamah* was perceived as a part of God that is being restored to its source. This raised questions of whether souls retain individual personalities in the hereafter.

Kabbalah was the only Jewish movement for which the transmigration of souls (*gilgul*)<sup>27</sup> was the normative afterlife doctrine, a notion they often combined with belief in the preexistence of souls. One popular theory spoke of each soul fashioning a spiritual garment composed of virtuous deeds, which it will don when it is finally admitted to God's presence. Early Kabbalists envisaged metempsychosis as a punishment, or second chance, for certain transgressions (especially sexual ones). However, later sources treat it as a normal process, which is not necessarily restricted to human bodies. Various authors disagreed over specifics; for example, how many times can a person be reincarnated? Why is there need for punishment both through reincarnation and through the fires of Gehenna?

Variations on the transmigration motif include the belief that a departed soul can enter ("impregnate") a living person to fulfill certain missions. Kabbalistic folklore often spoke of possession (*dibbuk*) by sinful spirits who had forfeited their right to redemptive transmigration.

#### MODERN JUDAISM (from ca. 1750)<sup>28</sup>

Since the admission of Jews to full participation in European society exposed them to contemporary intellectual currents, Jewish theology has been distinguished less by its promulgation of original ideas than by its varying degrees of resistance or receptivity to outside (usually Christian) concepts.

Acknowledgment of the principle of physical resurrection continues to be a defining feature of traditional ("Orthodox") Judaism, reinforced by avowals in the daily liturgy. The Talmudic doctrine is usually interpreted through its classic medieval formulations, whether philosophical (especially the Maimonidean version) or Kabbalistic (Isaac Luria's teachings continue to exercise strong influences on the Hasidic movement and in Oriental Jewish communities).

The Jewish Reform movement, which developed in central and western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, professed both a rejection of Rabbinic authority and a determination to conform to the social needs and cultural climate of modern Europe. From both these perspectives, literal belief in resurrection was generally considered unacceptable. Liberal Protestants, who often spoke in the name of universalistic enlightenment, preferred a model of spiritual immortality, and many "enlightened" and liberal Jews shared the conviction that immortality of the soul is rationally demonstrable.<sup>29</sup>

Discussions of the afterlife are almost entirely absent from non-Orthodox twentieth-century religious discourse, which has focused on the absolute commitment to this world as the setting for the encounter with the divine, the covenant between God and Israel, and the obligation to serve humanity.<sup>30</sup> Even Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), whose theology was responding to the challenges of human mortality, conceived of eternity as a religious dimension of *life*, not as an afterlife state. Similarly, the important theological responses to the Nazi Holocaust, as formulated by authors like Elie Wiesel, Emil Fackenheim, Richard Rubinstein, and others, have been rendered more poignant and painful by their reluctance to appeal to a supernatural retribution in a World to Come.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Works cited in this section include Yehzkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress

Press, 1974), pp. 100–6; Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London and Copenhagen: Oxford University Press and Branner og Korch, 1973), pp. 460–70. Thanks to Dr. Michael DeRoche for directing me to useful references.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. F. Brandon, *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 116–17, attaches importance to 1 Samuel 25:29, where Abigail blesses David saying, “Yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out.” However, “soul” might serve here as an equivalent to “life,” so that the text would mean that God will preserve David’s life but quickly cast down his enemies.

<sup>3</sup> “The etymology of [*she’ol*] is still obscure. . . . Friedrich Delitzsch identified it with a supposed Babylonian term *shu’alu*. But this view has long since been abandoned” (Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965], p. 173).

<sup>4</sup> Kaufmann, p. 311.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Wayne Pitard, “Afterlife and Immortality,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 15–16. Brandon (pp. 118–29) regards the “Yahwist” antipathy to afterlife ideas as a byproduct of their attempt to replace local tribal cults with a centralized national religion.

<sup>6</sup> Works that deal with afterlife conceptions during this period include Brandon, pp. 129–50; Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962–), 1:135–38, 357; 2:38–41, 345; Shaye D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:279–322, 88–92; G. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (1972); E. P. Sanders, *Judaism Practice and Belief* (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1992), pp. 298–303; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. G. Vermes et al. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979), 2:391–92, 539–47.

<sup>7</sup> The author of Ecclesiastes ironically described how death renders futile all human achievement.

<sup>8</sup> Shaul Shaked, “Iranian Influence on Judaism,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–), 1:308–25.

<sup>9</sup> Hellenistic Jewish thinkers like Philo of Alexandria and the author of the Wisdom of Solomon speak disparagingly of the body as weighing down the soul (see Brandon, pp. 141–43; Sanders, pp. 298–99).

<sup>10</sup> See Schürer, pp. 391–92, 537–40.

<sup>11</sup> The survival of disembodied souls is mentioned in Enoch and Jubilees, works that occupy prominent places in the Qumran library (see Schürer, p. 539, n. 90 and p. 5, n. 93).

<sup>12</sup> I am aware of no full-scale monograph on afterlife conceptions during the Talmudic era. Much information can be gleaned from the pertinent index entries in Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Talmudic sources know of a Platonic-like idea of the *pre-existent* souls (see Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* [Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987], pp. 235–48).

<sup>14</sup> This view is also found in apocalyptic works like 4 Ezra (7:31–34) (see Schürer, p. 539).

<sup>15</sup> H. Albeck, *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Bialik Institute and Dvir, 1959), 4:454.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Finkelstein, *Mabo le-Massektot Abot ve-Abot d’Rabbi Natan* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), pp. 212–20; Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch, 1972), pp. 361–64.

<sup>17</sup> Urbach, pp. 436–44.

<sup>18</sup> Schürer, pp. 540–41.

<sup>19</sup> See especially Jeremiah 7:32–33. S. Klein has suggested that some of the Rabbinic references might have originally been to the “Vale of Hamon” in Transjordan, site of a hot spring whose underground source was popularly linked to the flames of Hell (“*Ha’nahotei’ verabbah bar bar hana,*” *Me’assef Zion* 5 [1933], pp. 1–13).

<sup>20</sup> The issue is obviously symbolic. The God who can reconstitute decomposed flesh is surely able to reassemble dispersed ashes.

<sup>21</sup> Standard surveys of medieval Jewish philosophy include Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1973); Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Guttmann, pp. 82–83; Husik, pp. 41–47; Sirat, pp. 33–35.

<sup>23</sup> Guttmann, pp. 152–59, 176–78, 199–207; Husik, pp. xxxiv–xlvii; Sirat, pp. 170–71, 187–88, 203.

<sup>24</sup> Guttmann, pp. 208–9; Sirat, pp. 170–72.

<sup>25</sup> Material related to this section is collected in Gerschom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library, 1978).

<sup>26</sup> Scholem, pp. 155-65.

<sup>27</sup> Scholem, pp. 347-50.

<sup>28</sup> Useful summaries include Guttman; Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Behrman House, 1983); Simon Noveck, ed., *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century* (Clinton: B'nai Brith, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> This was maintained by otherwise diverse thinkers like the traditionalist Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), the pioneer of Jewish Enlightenment, and the liberal Solomon Steinheim (1789-1866).

<sup>30</sup> This is true of such well-known Jewish existentialists as Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, and others. An articulate exception is Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), pp. 319-22.