

Coffee with the Cantor

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Perceptions of Modern Judaism:

Jewish and Non-Jewish Views on Death and Afterlife

I. From near-death.com

A Brief Survey of the Afterlife Beliefs in Judaism

By Kevin Williams

The core of **Judaism** is a covenant relationship - which is both a contractual agreement and a "marriage" of love - between Yahweh and his chosen people. Because Judaism is built around a relationship involving agreements and promises in this life, the afterlife is less essential for Judaism than for other world religions. It would, in fact, be relatively easy to imagine Judaism without any afterlife beliefs whatsoever. Because of the non-centrality of the afterlife for Judaism, this tradition has been able to entertain a **wide variety of different afterlife notions** throughout its history, more so than perhaps any other religion.

The ancient Hebrews emphasized the importance of the present life over the afterlife. As with both the ancient Greeks and Mesopotamians, the afterlife, if it was considered at all, was conceived of as a pale shadow of earthly life, much like the Greek Hades. Also similar to the Greek Hades, in the Hebrew afterlife no distinction was made between the treatment of the just and the unjust after death. Instead, rewards and punishments were meted out in the present life, and in the covenant "contract" Yahweh promised to do just that.

Reflection on the inequalities of this life and on the apparent failure of Yahweh to make good on his covenant promises led serious religious thinkers to consider the option of resurrection. The resurrection of ordinary human beings seems to have originated in the Persian religion of **Zoroastrianism**. As a result of several centuries of Persian control of the Middle East region, Jews were brought into contact with Zoroastrian religious ideas and the notion of resurrection. Zoroaster combined resurrection with the idea of a final judgment, in which the entire human race is resurrected and individuals rewarded or punished. This concept clearly appealed to Jewish religious thinkers of the time as an adequate way of coming to grips with the injustices that were so apparent in this life.

As implied in the Book of Daniel, the Jewish notion of resurrection in the Maccabean period was tied to a notion of judgment, and even to separate realms for the judged. In rabbinical thought, the model for heaven was Eden. The rabbinic word for hell, "Gehenna", is taken from the name of a valley of fire where children were said to be sacrificed as burnt offerings to Baal and Moloch (Semitic deities). Gehenna is a place of intense punishment and cleansing. This place is also known as "She'ol" and other names. This line of Jewish thought argues that after death the soul has to be purified before it can go on the rest of its journey. The amount of time needed for purification depends on how the soul dealt with life. One Jewish tradition states that a soul needs a maximum of 11 months for purification, which is why, when a parent dies, the kaddish (memorial prayer) is recited for 11 months. The concept of Gehenna as a place for temporary purification was the source for the orthodox Christian doctrine of "purgatory."

The first-century Jewish historian [Flavius Josephus](#) stated that the [Pharisees](#), the Jewish sect that founded rabbinic Judaism to which Paul once belonged, believed in reincarnation. He writes that the Pharisees believed the souls of evil men are punished after death. The souls of good men are "removed into other bodies" and they will "have power to revive and live again."

From time to time in Jewish history, there had been an insistent belief that their prophets were reborn. Reincarnation was part of the Jewish dogmas, being taught under the name of "resurrection". Only the [Sadducees](#), who believed that everything ended with death, did not accept the idea of reincarnation. Jewish ideas included the concept that people could live again without knowing exactly the manners by which this could happen.

Josephus records that the [Essenes](#) of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) lived "the same kind of life" as the followers of [Pythagoras](#), the Greek philosopher who taught reincarnation. According to Josephus, the Essenes believed that the soul is both immortal and preexistent, necessary for tenets for belief in reincarnation.

The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the Jewish mystical tradition of divine union went back to the first, perhaps even the third century B.C.E. Jewish mysticism has its origins in Greek mysticism, a system of belief which included reincarnation. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of the hymns found are similar to the [Hekhaloth](#) hymns of the Jewish mystics. One text of hymns gives us clear evidence of Jewish mysticism. The text is called "[Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice](#)." Fragments of [1 Enoch](#), which is considered the oldest text of Jewish mysticism, were also found with the Scrolls. Since evidence shows Jewish mysticism existed in the third century B.C.E., as Enoch indicates, then it would certainly have existed in first-century Israel. Reincarnation has been a belief for thousands of years for orthodox Jews. The [Zohar](#) is a book of great authority among [Kabbalistic Jews](#). It states the following:

"All souls are subject to revolutions. Men do not know the way they have been judged in all time." (Zohar II, 199b)

That is, in their "revolutions" they lose all memory of the actions that led to their being judged. Another Kabbalistic book, the [Kether Malkuth](#) states:

"If she, the soul, be pure, then she shall obtain favor... but if she has been defiled, then she shall wander for a time in Malkuth)

How can the soul be defiled before birth? Where does the soul wander if not on this or some other world until the days of her purification? The rabbis explained this verse to mean that the defiled soul wanders down from paradise through many births until the soul regained its purity. In the Talmud, "[gilgul neshamot](#)" (i.e., reincarnation) is constantly mentioned. The term literally means "the judgment of the revolutions of the souls." In this view, people who had committed extraordinary sins were given an opportunity to return to life in order to set things right. More particularly, they were reincarnated in circumstances similar to those of their previous incarnation. Thus, Moses and Jethro, for example, were supposed to be the gilgulim of Cain and Abel.

[Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel](#) (1604-1657), one of the most revered Rabbis in Israel, states in his book entitled [Nishmat Hayyim](#):

"The belief or the doctrine of the transmigration of souls is a firm and infallible dogma accepted by the whole assembly found who would dare to deny it ... Indeed, there is a great number of sages in Israel who hold firm to this doctrine ... We are therefore in duty bound to obey and to accept this dogma with acclamation ... as the truth of it has been in the mouths of the Kabbalists." ([Nishmat Hayyim](#))

In contemporary Judaism, the traditional, mainstream view of resurrection is maintained by the orthodox, but generally not by the non-orthodox. Outside the orthodox fold, ordinary believers often accept the notion of an immortal soul, not unlike the notion held by most Christians. Many also accepted reincarnation. And many secular and [Reform Jews](#) continue to view themselves as part of the tradition of Judaism, without adhering to any sort of afterlife belief.

Tagline

I am Kevin Williams, the Webmaster of Near-Death.com

Introduction

I am a [middle-aged](#), [computer scientist](#), [cable news junkie](#), [manic depressive](#), [Christian Universalist](#) with [Gnostic](#) and [Tibetan Buddhist](#) leanings, former [Montana cowboy](#), [U.S. Army veteran](#), [social liberal](#), [economic conservative](#), [single Californian](#), hopeless [Internet addict](#), and last but not least, [near-death experience evangelist](#). I am the author of "[Nothing Better Than Death](#)" and webmaster of [www.near-death.com](#) - the [#1 Google ranked website](#) on [near-death experiences](#).

II. From Jewishencyclopedia.com (1906)

DEATH, VIEWS AND CUSTOMS CONCERNING.

—In Biblical and Apocryphal Literature:

The ancient Hebrews expected to "be gathered to [or sleep with] their fathers" when death befell them (Gen. xxv. 8, xlvii. 30), and feared only the idea of going down to Sheol mourning (*ib.* xxxvii. 35). To sleep and be at rest was the desire of the distressed (Job iii. 13-22). To die "in a good old age" was regarded as a blessing (Gen. xv. 15, xxv.8); to be cut off from the land of the living in the noontide of life was dreaded and looked upon as a misfortune

(Isa. xxxviii. 10). Only occasionally the stings of death and the stroke of Sheol became terrors, from which the Lord was petitioned to redeem man (Hosea xiii. 14; Ps. xvi. 10, xlix. 16 [15], lxxxvi. 13). Nowhere, however, in the Bible is death regarded as a real evil, except from the point of view that man, being of divine origin, should have had, like any other heavenly being, access to the tree of life and have lived forever (Gen. iii. 22). Accordingly, the eschatological view found expression in such phrases as that "the death will be swallowed up forever" and "the dead shall rise again" (compare Isa. xxv. 8, xxvi. 19).

Still the popular view in the days of Kohelet (Eccl. vii. 1, ix. 4-6) and of Ben Sira (Ecclus. [Sirach] xli. 1-4) was that there was no other prospect for man but that of the dreary life of the shades in Sheol, and this made life on earth all the more precious. Nor did this view in any way prevent Ben Sira from seeing in the yielding of the first woman to the tempter the cause of men's death (*ib.* xxv. 24). More pronounced on the latter point is the Book of Wisdom: "God created man to be immortal; . . . nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world" (Wisdom ii. 23, 24). "For God made not death; through righteousness immortality is obtained" (*ib.* i. 13, 16; vi. 18; xv. 3). This view (expressed also in Ethiopic Enoch. xcvi. 4 and Slavonic Enoch, xxx. 16-18) was made the basic idea of Paul's system of salvation (Rom. v. 12; I Cor. xv. 21; Heb. ii. 14), after the apocalyptic literature of the Jews had made the problem of sin and death the object of most serious reflection, which culminated in the hope of the final annihilation of death in the world to come (IV. Esd. iii. 7; vii. 32, 119; viii. 53). Satan is called in the New Testament "a murderer from the beginning" (John viii. 44) and "the destroyer" (I Cor. x. 10). [See Death, Angel of, in Rabbinical Literature.](#)

Death is conceived of as a person who has charge of the shades in the nether world (Ps. xlix. 15; [see also Demonology](#)). He is their general (Gen. R. xxvi.).

The following is the description of Death as one of God's messengers:

"When Abraham had refused to let the archangel Michael take his soul, God said to the latter: 'Call Me hither Death of the shameless countenance and the pitiless look, [this seems to allude to the name of Azazel — קזזל — and the deadly look (הרע קין)]. Death shivered and trembled at being called to come before the Lord, when God said to him: 'Come hither, thou bitter and fierce name of the world [an allusion to both Azazel and אזאזל, I Sam. XV. 32], hide thy fierceness, cover thy corruption, and cast away thy bitterness from thee, and put on thy beauty and all thy glory, and go down to Abraham My friend and bring him to Me.' Death put on a robe of great brightness and made his appearance like the sun, and became fair and beautiful above the sons of men, assuming the form of an archangel, his cheeks flaming with fire, and went to Abraham, a sweet odor and a flash of light announcing his coming to the patriarch, who took him to be an archangel, the chief captain of God, and welcomed him as the bringer of light and a most glorious helper. But Death rejoined: 'Most righteous Abraham, I am the bitter drop of Death' [טס המות], whence the name טסאל; and when asked for his errand, he said: 'For thy holy soul am I come.' Abraham again refused to give up his soul. Death followed him into his chamber, and when Abraham lay down upon his couch, he sat by his feet and would not depart, notwithstanding all the entreaties of the patriarch to let him live.

"On inquiry of the patriarch, he told him that only because of his great righteousness, his hospitality to men, and his love toward God, which became a crown of glory upon his head, did he approach him in such beauty and glory; to sinners he came in fierceness, corruption, and bitterness. 'Show me these,' asked Abraham; but Death replied,

'Thou canst not stand these looks.' Thereto Abraham answered: 'By means of the name of the living God—**שם המפורש** —I shall be able to look.' So Death put off his sunlike glory and put on his tyrant-like robe and made his appearance fiercer than all wild beasts, and filthier than all filth, and he showed Abraham seven fiery serpents' heads and fourteen faces: (1) of flaming fire, (2) of darkness, (3) of a viper, (4) of a precipice, (5) of a fierce asp, (6) of a terrible lion, (7) of a cerastes, (8) of a basilisk, (9) of a fiery simitar, (10) of terrible lightning and thunder. (11) of a stormy sea, (12) of a rushing river, (13) of a three-headed serpent, and (14) of a cup filled with poison; and then he showed him every mortal disease emanating from the odor of Death. Seven thousand man-and maid-servants of Abraham died from the effect of this odor and sight, so that Abraham implored Death to hide his fierceness and to put on his former garb of beauty. Death complied with his request, and joined Abraham in a prayer to God to restore to life those who had died so suddenly by his fierceness; and the prayer was granted.

"Abraham, however, would not consent to surrender his soul until Death had explained to him the different forms and faces he had shown him in all their fierceness; whereupon Death replied that the seven heads of serpents indicated the seven ages during which he is to destroy all men, rich and poor, and to bring them to the bottom of Hades. Because people die by fire, by falling from precipices, by the sword, by rushing rivers, on the raging sea, and in storms of lightning, by wild beasts or cups of poison, he assumed all those aspects. Finally, he spoke of the seventy-two kinds of death [see [Abraham, Testament of](#), and footnote, *Jew. Encyc. i. 95b*] and of the death of the righteous. Then Death took the right hand of Abraham, and his soul clung to him."

Death appears here as the personification of psychical evil, with numerous traits borrowed from Ahriman in the Zend Avesta, but not of moral evil (see *Test. Abraham, A. xvi.-xx.*; "Texts and Studies," ii. 2, Cambridge, 1892; "Anti-Nicene Fathers," Eng. transl., pp. 183 *et seq.*, New York, 1897; see also [Dumah](#)).

Cause of Death.

—In Rabbinical Literature:

There are different views among Jews concerning the cause of death. Some assign it to Adam's first sin in partaking of the forbidden fruit (*Tanna debe Eliyahu R. v.*). This view is somewhat modified by the Rabbis, who regard death as the fruit of personal sin; maintaining that, like Adam, each person dies on account of his own sin (*Shab. 55a, b*), as "there is not a righteous man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (*Eccl. vii. 20*). Still, the Rabbis speak of a number of "saintly men who died without sin and only in consequence of the poison of the serpent" (**בעטיו של נחש**), *e.g.*, Benjamin; Amram; Jesse, the father of David; and Chileab, David's son (*Shab. 55b*; *B. B. 17a*; compare *Derek Erez Zuṭa*, where thirteen persons are named). Another view is that death was ordained at creation, and that Adam by his sin merely hastened death (*Ex. R. ii.*; *Tan. [Yelamdenu], Wayesheb*, ed. Vienna, 44b). According to others, Adam was destined to live forever and not to taste death, but, owing to the fact that men like Hiram of Tyre and Nebuchadnezzar wanted to be worshiped as gods, God decreed death for man (*Ex. R. ix.*). The opinion is also expressed that God would have annihilated the power of the angel of death over Israel after its acceptance of the Law, but for the fact that the divine decree could not be reversed (*'Ab. Zarah 5a*). From the point of view that sin precedes and causes death in each person, the Talmud designates special reasons for the death of innocent children (*Shab. 32b*).

Modes of Death.

There are 903 (תוצאות, Ps. lxxviii. 21) distinct deaths. The hardest is by asthma; and the easiest is called מיתה נשיקה ("death by the kiss"), which is "like drawing a hair out of milk": that is the interpretation of על פי יי ("by the mouth of the Lord," Deut. xxxiv. 5, Hebr.). Six persons are known to have died in that way; namely, the three patriarchs, and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (B. B. 17a).

Death coming after five days' illness is considered ordinary; after four days, a reprimand of Heaven; after three days, a severe rebuke; after two days, a hastened death; after one day, a sudden one, or, according to some, an apoplectic one (M. K. 28a). To die before reaching the age of fifty is כרת ("to be cut off," Lev. xviii. 29). Sixty years is a ripe age; seventy is old age; and eighty, advanced age (M. K. 28a).

Communication with the Living.

Many allegorical tales are related in rabbinical literature about the communication of the dead with the living. A pious man, being rebuked by his wife for giving away a dinar (denarius) to a beggar in time of famine, went to sleep in the cemetery. It was New-Year's eve, and he overheard the spirits of two women gossiping. One of them proposed to fly and listen behind the curtain in the judgment chamber to the promulgation of the future visitations in the world. The other spirit excused herself, saying, "I can not accompany thee because I am buried in reed matting; go thyself, and come back and tell me what thou hearest." Presently her companion returned and reported: "I heard that the hail will kill whatever is planted in the first rainy season." The pious man planted in the second season. The following year he again went to sleep in the cemetery on New-Year's eve, and overheard a similar conversation, gaining the information that whatever was planted in the second season would be consumed by blight. The pious man planted during the first season. His wife was curious to know how he managed to evade the calamitous visitations, and he, being pressed, related his story. A few days later the woman had a quarrel with the mother of the second spirit, and abused her for having given her daughter an indecent burial. The third year the pious husband again sought to obtain information regarding future crops; the second spirit said, "Hush, companion! our former conversation was overheard by mortal men" (Ber. 18a).

R. Ze'ira left his money with the mistress of a boarding-house. Returning, he found that she had died. He repaired to the cemetery and inquired of her: "Where is my money?" Said she: "Go, take it from the socket under the door-pivot. At the same time tell my mother to send me my comb and the eye-dye flask by a certain woman who will arrive here to-morrow" (*ib.* 18b).

A similar story is told of Samuel, who was absent when his father Abba died, and wished to find out where he treasured the money entrusted to him by orphans. Samuel went to the cemetery and inquired after "Abba," but was told, "There are many 'Abbas' here." Said he, "I want Abba, the son of Abba." "There are many by this name." "But I want Abba b. Abba, the father of Samuel [Samuel being more famous than his father]; where is he?" He was informed that his father was studying at the high yeshibah in heaven. On reaching it Samuel observed Levi standing outside, as a punishment for not attending R. Aphi's yeshibah below. Meanwhile Abba appeared. Samuel saw him crying and laughing, and asked him: "Why cryest thou?" "Because thou wilt soon join us." "Why laughest thou?" "Because thou art very much respected here." "If so," said Samuel, "let Levi enter!" And Levi was allowed to enter. Then the father informed Samuel where to find the money (*ib.*).

Continued Consciousness of the Dead.

The dead are supposed to take an active interest in worldly affairs. The assertion of Kohelet that "The dead know not anything" (Eccl. ix, 5) is interpreted. "The wicked who are considered dead while yet alive." R. Isaac said, "The sting of a worm to the dead is like the pricking of a pin in the flesh of the living" (Shab. 13b). The dead are very sensitive. One must not tell tales around the death-bed of a scholar (Ber. 19a). Inasmuch, however, as the dead are exempt from performing the precepts, they feel slighted if such performance should take place in their presence by the living, as it would be like "mocking the poor" (Prov. xvii. 5). R. Ḥiyya, on his way to the cemetery with R. Jonathan, noticed the *zizit* of the latter's garment untied, and admonished him to pick them up, else the dead would remark, "To-morrow they will join us, and now they scoff us" (Ber. 18a; compare Yer. Ber. 4c, d; Eccl. R. ix. 5; see Bacher, "Ag. Tan." ii. 526). From this it is inferred that where the custom prevails to wrap the dead with a *ṭallit* over the shroud, the fringe must be removed or made unfit for purposes of prayer (Shulḥan 'Aruk, Yoreh De'ah, 351). Also, in burying a scholar it is customary to deposit in his coffin a scroll that is unfit for reading (*ib.* 351; Maimonides, "Yad," Sefer Torah, x. 36).

The Zohar obviously disapproves this practise of making use of the cemetery as a *genizah* for defective scrolls, and tells the following story of R. Hezekiah and R. Jose, who were passing the ruins of Aleppo in Syria, the latter carrying along a fragment of a scroll. While resting they heard a rumbling noise arising from a grave, and a cry: "Wo, wo, the world must be in trouble, for the Torah has appeared here. Or perhaps they come again to laugh at us and disgrace us?" The rabbis were frightened and asked, "Who art thou?" "I am a dead man. Once upon a time, when the world was in trouble, R. Ḥiyya came here with a scroll to pray. I and my comrades went out to meet him, and introduced him to the patriarchs in paradise; but on examination the scroll was found to be defective, having a superfluous letter 'waw' in the word **פרסות** [Lev. xi. 3], and because we admitted him we were expelled from the high yeshibah" (Zohar, ed. Cracow, **אתרי מות**) 127.

Prayers to and of the Dead.

The practise of praying for the intercession of the dead is of early origin. Caleb on reaching Hebron visited the cave of Machpelah, and prayed to the patriarch to be saved from cooperating in the conspiracy of the scouts sent by Moses to make a report of the conditions existing in the Holy Land (Soṭah 34b). The Talmud mentions the custom of visiting the cemetery to request the dead to pray for the living (Ta'an. 16a; compare *ib.* 23b).

The Soul of the Dying.

The noise of the soul's departure from the body reverberates through the world from one end to the other, and yet the sound is unheard (Yoma 20b). Prior to the soul's exit it sees the Shekinah (Pirḳe R. El. xxxiv.). The soul after death is in the same condition as it is in life when one dreams (*ib.*). Until the body is entirely consumed the soul hovers over the grave (Shab. 152b).

R. Judah ha-Nasi in his last will commanded his sons that on every Sabbath eve after his demise they should continue to light the candles, set the table, and prepare the couch in their customary places, as on every Sabbath eve he would visit his home. Once a neighbor knocked at the door for entrance, and Rabbi's servant answered: "Hush! Rabbi is at home." After this, Rabbi ceased his visits, so as not to reflect on the righteous men who died before him (Ket. 103a). Samuel said: "If one wants to have a taste of death, let him sleep with his shoes on" (Yoma 78b). "And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. i. 31). "This includes death," wrote R. Meir on the margin of his Bible, playing on the similarity of **מאוד** and **מות** (Gen. R. ix.). "The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth" (Eccl. vii. 1) is explained in Eccl. R. *ad loc.* and Ex. R. xlviii. to mean that

"death tells of the meritorious life of the departed; it is like the vessel entering port laden with goods." The great ones of each generation must die to make room for the greatness of successors; "the righteous themselves ask for death as a favor" (Midr. Teh. to Ps. cxvi. 15). The Zohar calls death a festal day (יומא דהילולא; Zohar, Shemini, in referring to the death of Nadab and Abihu; compare also Heilprin, "'Er Ke ha-Kinnuyim," fol. 20c.) The day when Adam died was made a holiday (Tanna debe Eliyahu R. xvi.).

The windows of the death-chamber should be opened to allow the spirits to enter and to depart (מעבר יבק, s.v. שפתי כהן, vi.; see [Birds as Souls](#)).

Superstitions.

The angel of death is supposed to wipe his bloody knife in water near the dead; hence all water of the adjacent houses must be emptied on the ground (Yoreh De'ah, 339). As the "shedim" are supposed to follow the dead or to hover around the graves, those who follow a funeral cortège must wash their hands on their return, before entering a house (*ib.* 376, 4); but should not dip them in the river. A special lavatory for this purpose is usually provided at the cemetery. On returning from the funeral one should sit down and rest on the way several times, so as to drive away the spirits that follow him (Ṭur Yoreh De'ah, 375). The board upon which the dead is cleansed must not be turned over. One should not visit the same grave twice during one day (Will of R. Judah the Pious); nor sleep in the cemetery (Nid. 17a); nor look closely on the face of a dead person; nor kiss the dead, not even when a near relative ("Sefer Ḥasidim," § 236).

Omens of Death.

A common superstition is current that if the shadow of one's head is invisible against the wall in a house where a light is burning on [Hosha'na Rabbah](#) eve, it is a sign that the person is destined to die within the year; if visible, he will live (see Nahmani, commentary on Num. xiv. 9). R. Ammi says: "If one wishes to know whether he will live during the following year, let him during the ten Penitential Days burn a candle in his house where no wind can blow it out. If it does not become extinguished he will live; otherwise, not" (Hor. 12a). To discover whether the husband or the wife will die first, calculate the numerical value of the letters in the names of both. If the amount is even, the man will die first; if odd, the woman (נפלאים מעשׂים, letter Mem, § 6).

Superstitions concerning death in connection with dreams are numerous. One of them, the vision of a scroll in the Ark, foretells death, as the death of Aaron follows the description of the tablets placed in the Ark ("Sefer Ḥasidim," § 533). See [Dreams](#).

A dying child may be released from death's grasp if nominally sold by the parents to a friend for a shekel ("Sefer Ḥasidim," § 245). A change of name may save from death (R. H. 16b). Removal of a feather pillow from beneath the head of a dying person helps the soul to depart more easily. But some rabbis objected to this treatment, on the ground that it disturbs the sinking person and hastens his death (כנה"ג to Ṭur Yoreh De'ah, 339; "Sefer Ḥasidim," § 245-246). The iron keys of the synagogue, if placed under the pillow, have the same effect (*ib.*). In accordance with Prov. x. 18: "He that uttereth slander [דבה = "evil news"] is a fool." Announcement of death should be made indirectly (Pes. 3b); it was for this reason that the shofar was blown in Talmudical times when death occurred in a town (M. K. 27b). The beadle who summons the congregation to early morning prayer by three knocks at their doors or windows, announces a death in the town by reducing the number of knocks to two. It is a good omen to

die with a smile on the face, or to die on one's birthday. Rain on the day of a funeral is a sign of compassion and forgiveness toward the dead (Tur Yoreh De'ah, 353).

It is customary to bend the thumb of the corpse so that the whole hand resembles the word "Shaddai" (Almighty), and to bind it in this position with the *zizit*. A shard is placed on the eyes, a little stick in the hands, a piece of metal on the body, a little bag with earth from the Holy Land under the head, and a three-toothed wooden fork in the hands, to enable the dead to excavate a subterranean way to the Holy Land on the day of resurrection, when all the Jewish dead will arise in Palestine. A towel is hung up and a glass of water placed beside it, so that the soul might bathe when it returns to the body.

III. From interfaithfamily.com

Jewish Views on the Afterlife

By Lisa Klug

April, 1999

When Jody Rosenblatt Feld was in high school, a gentile teacher told her Jews don't believe in heaven and hell. Only after a lot of study did she realize that wasn't so.

"There is so much material on a Jewish afterlife, heaven and hell," says Rosenblatt Feld, a scholar and teacher. "You'd be amazed to how much there is."

Many Jews who grow up in a liberal context were taught that Judaism emphasizes the here and now and that we don't have any notions about the afterlife. "There is some truth in that, but it is not the whole picture," says Conservative Rabbi Rona Shapiro.

Jewish views on death are discussed in the Talmud and other Jewish texts, where heaven is called Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden, or Olam HaBa, the next world. Whereas Gan Eden is considered a place of spiritual fulfillment, Gehennom, or hell, is a place of intense punishment and cleansing. It takes its name from the Valley of Hennom, where pagans once sacrificed children..

There are, however, diverging views about the afterlife, even among Jewish scholars. "I don't believe that there is one systematic view in the writings of Hazal, the early rabbis," says Orthodox Rabbi Eliezer Finkelman. "Rather, there are various statements, some derived from traditions, speculation or the words of the prophets. These are not all necessarily compatible."

But they all are Jewish. Here are a few:

In *Pirke Avot*, this world is considered preparation for the next. *Ethics of the Fathers*, as this text is called in English, discusses the need to prepare yourself in "the corridor so that you can enter the banquet hall." Correspondingly, one way to look at mitzvot--commandments, such as giving to charity or observing the Sabbath--is to bring merit upon yourself [in order] to enter or enjoy the world to come, Finkelman says.

One line of thought argues that after death the soul has to be purified before it can go on the rest of its journey. The amount of time needed for purification depends on how the soul dealt with life, Finkelman says. One custom says that a soul needs a maximum of 11 months for purification, which is why, when a parent dies, the kaddish (memorial prayer) is recited for 11 months.

Even if a soul enters Gehennom (hell), it is not eternal. "There is not a lot of emphasis on the fires of hell, as there is in Christianity," Rabbi Shapiro says.

Some Jews believe purification of the soul occurs in hell. In fact, different aspects of hell (Gehennom) address certain sins. A Gehennom-of-Snow purifies coldness toward the commandments or Torah. And a Gehennom-of-Fire, which is 60 times hotter than fire in this world, fights passions toward forbidden activities. "You fight fire with fire and coldness with coldness," says Yehuda Ferris, a Chabad rabbi. "It's a favor to sinners, because once you cleanse yourself in Gehennom, then you are assured of a place in the world to come."

Other traditional texts about hell discuss Avraham the Patriarch, who is said to sit at the gates of hell, where he examines men for a brit milah, or circumcision. If the men are circumcised, Avraham turns them away because Gehennom is such a horrible place.

In contrast, in the Garden of Eden (Gan Eden), righteous Jews bask in the glory of the Shekhina (the Divine presence). "How much of G-d you take in, just as in this life, is in accordance with what you've earned," Rosenblatt Feld says. "How much you've grown in this life determines how you experience the next."

But all Jews have it better in heaven. "According to the Jewish picture, Jews are the favored in the next world (Olam HaBa)," Rosenblatt Feld says. "They have it hard in this world because they have it good in the next."

This concept also addresses the problem of justice in this world, Finkelman says. The question of misfortune befalling a righteous person (tzadik v'ra lo), as described in the book of Job, bothered the rabbis a lot. "But the tradition understands that in some way justice is served in heaven (Olam HaBa)," Finkelman says.

Although there is disagreement about these views, most scholars agree that classical Judaism expresses a belief in the resurrection of souls and maybe even bodies, in the messianic age. "We say, 'You are eternally mighty, Resuscitator of the dead' (mechaiyeh metim atah rav l'hoshia)," Finkelman says of the Amidah, or silent devotion, said in daily prayers. (This applies only to Conservative and Orthodox prayer books. Reform and Reconstructionist prayer books do not use this terminology.) "The whole thing is considered to be a miracle of a heroic transcendence (g'vurot HaShem)."

This leads to other questions. Does it mean that only during the end of days, in the messianic age, do we experience the next world? Or does a person enter heaven shortly after he or she dies? Both possibilities are discussed in Judaism, Finkelman says.

Although this may come as a surprise, there is a Jewish concept of reincarnation (gigul nefesh)--transmigration of souls, which is described in Kabbalah, a collection of texts discussing Judaism's mystical tradition. Every Jewish soul has to return to this world if it didn't complete the performance of 613 commandments.

The concept of reincarnation developed in the mid-1500s, especially in the works of one of the students of HaAri, Reb Yitzhak Luria, who revolutionized kabbalistic thinking. This student, Reb Chaim Vital, wrote a book titled *Sha'ar HaGigulim/The Gate of The Transmigration of Souls*, which popularized the idea.

Vital's complex version of reincarnation identifies several different types of souls. A person can be born, for instance, with a pure soul, a complete soul that belonged to another person. Or a person can be born with the good qualities of one soul and bad qualities of another.

The important thing, Rabbi Ferris says, is that only the good sticks with a soul for eternity. The bad falls away.

Traditional Jewish Views on the Afterlife:

- Jews do believe in heaven and hell.
- In Hebrew, heaven is called both Olam HaBa, the world to come, and Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden.
- In Olam HaBa, righteous Jews are blessed with living in the Divine presence.
- Jews are rewarded with a better life in Olam HaBa to make up for their misfortunes in this world.
- Gehennom, the Jewish concept of hell, is a place of cleansing to prepare a soul for a place in the world to come.
- Some sages believed that this world is merely preparation for the next and that fulfilling commandments earns a soul merit in the world to come.
- Some believe the soul needs to be purified before its final rest, but that this purification takes, at most, 11 months--the same amount of time required for mourning a parent.
- Judaism expresses faith in God as Resuscitator of the dead.
- The Jewish term for reincarnation, as discussed in Kabbalah, is gigul nefesh, transmigration of souls.
- A soul reincarnates, according to tradition, to make up for unfulfilled mitzvot (commandments), such as giving to charity or observing Shabbat.

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IV. VICTOR J ZAMMIT

A Lawyer Presents the Case for the Afterlife

How different religions view the Afterlife.

Christianity

Whilst there are different orthodox Christian beliefs – Catholics, Protestants, the Baptists and other Christians, the core of Christian belief about the afterlife is that there is an afterlife, that conduct on earth – how we behave - will determine where in the afterlife you will eventually end up. That there is a hell for the wicked ones – especially the Catholic Church still teaches that hellfire is for eternity and there is heaven for those who behaved well. Also, the Catholic Church claims there is an afterlife state which is between heaven and hell the Catholic Church calls 'purgatory.' The theological teaching is that after a time of purgation, the spirit will eventually be progress and will go to heaven. There are other Christians, the Protestants, who do not accept purgatory. Catholic theology also states that sinners can confess their sins to Catholic priests and those sins are forgiven for ever – it does not matter how grave the sins might be – including genocide – if the sinner truly repents, he will be forgiven.

Christian Beliefs about the Afterlife

Buddhism

Buddha accepted the basic Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma, as well as the notion that the ultimate goal of the religious life is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddha asserted that what keeps us bound to the death/rebirth process is desire, desire in the sense of wanting or craving anything in the world. Hence, the goal of getting off the Ferris wheel of reincarnation necessarily involves freeing oneself from desire. Nirvana is the Buddhist term for liberation. Nirvana literally means extinction, and it refers to the extinction of all craving, an extinction that allows one to become liberated.

Where Buddha departed most radically from Hinduism was in his doctrine of "anatta", the notion that individuals do not possess eternal souls. Instead of eternal souls, individuals consist of a "bundle" of habits, memories, sensations, desires, and so forth, which together delude one into thinking that he or she consists of a stable, lasting self. Despite its transitory nature, this false self hangs together as a unit, and even reincarnates in body after body. In Buddhism, as well as in Hinduism, life in a corporeal body is viewed negatively, as the source of all suffering. Hence, the goal is to obtain release. In Buddhism, this means abandoning the false sense of self so that the bundle of memories and impulses disintegrates, leaving nothing to reincarnate and hence nothing to experience pain.

From the perspective of present-day, world-affirming Western society, the Buddhist vision cannot but appear distinctly unappealing: Not only is this life portrayed as unattractive, the prospect of nirvana, in which one dissolves into nothingness, seems even less desirable. A modern-day Buddha might respond, however, that our reaction to being confronted with the dark side of life merely shows how insulated we are from the pain and suffering that is so fundamental to human existence.

Following death, according to Tibetan Buddhism, the spirit of the departed goes through a process lasting forty-nine days that is divided into three stages called "bardos." At the conclusion of the bardo, the person either enters nirvana or returns to earth for rebirth.

It is imperative that the dying individual remain fully aware for as long as possible because the thoughts one has while passing over into death heavily influence the nature of both the after-death experience and, if one fails to achieve nirvana, the state of one's next incarnation.

Stage one of the Bardo (called the "Chikai" Bardo), the bardo of dying, begins at death and extends from half a day to four days. This is the period of time necessary for the departed to realize that they have dropped the body. The consciousness of the departed has an ecstatic experience of the primary "Clear White Light" at the death moment. Everyone gets at least a fleeting glimpse of the light. The more spiritually developed see it longer, and are able to go beyond it to a higher level of reality. The average person, however, drops into the lesser state of the secondary "clear light."

In stage two (called the "Chonyid" Bardo), the bardo of Luminous Mind, the departed encounters the hallucinations resulting from the karma created during life. Unless highly developed, the individual will feel that they are still in the body. The departed then encounters various apparitions, the "peaceful" and "wrathful" deities, that are actually personifications of human feelings and that, to successfully achieve nirvana, the deceased must encounter unflinchingly. Only the most evolved individuals can skip the bardo experience altogether and transit directly into a paradise realm. Stage three (called the "Sidpa" Bardo), the bardo of rebirth, is the process of reincarnation.

Read more...[Kevin Williams](#) Buddhist Afterlife Beliefs

[Awareness is Everything: Buddhist Views on Death](#)

Laura Strong's Mythic Arts offers this article on Buddhist views of an afterlife and death.

[Buddhism Today - Rebirth](#)

Learn about the cycle of death and rebirth in Buddhist tradition in this article from Buddhism Today.

[Buddhism Today - Buddhist Afterlife](#)

Another great article from Buddhism Today teaches about the afterlife in Buddhism. The afterlife usually pertains to the intermediate phase between rebirths.

Judaism

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. It is possible for an Orthodox Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven, or that they are reincarnated through many lifetimes, or that they simply wait until the coming of the messiah, when they will be resurrected. Likewise, Orthodox Jews can believe that the souls of the wicked are tormented by demons of their own creation, or that wicked souls are simply destroyed at death, ceasing to exist.

See Judaism 101 Olam Ha-Ba:

The Afterlife <http://www.jewfaq.org/olamhaba.htm>

Islam

According to the tenets of the Muslim faith, death is the complete end of physical life and the beginning of a period of rest until the day of resurrection when Allah judges the living and the dead. Many Muslims believe that the righteous are able to see visions of God after death and that the wicked see visions of hell. Except for these possible visions of heaven or hell, Muslims believe the soul remains in a kind of "soul sleep" until Judgment Day. When the Day of Judgment arrives, everyone is judged according to their deeds in life. Many Muslims believe that non-Muslims can attain heaven only after a period of purification in the fires of purgatory.

In the eighth century, a mystical sect of Islam began which merged the mystical traditions of the Greeks,

Buddhists and Hindus with traditional Islamic faith. Concepts found in Sufism can be found in a great many near-death experiences which have been reported. The Sufi masters teach that, after death, a person judges himself thereby bringing about their own heaven or hell. Sufism is known as "the Way of the Heart" and the "Way of the Pure." It is a means by which one can move from the lower level of self to ascend to the Divine Light that penetrates the entire universe. This light concept is common to many other religions as well as the near-death experience. According to Sufi tradition, there are many ways to ascend, but the essence of the path to God is to find yourself. As the Sufi saying states, "Know yourself, know your Lord."

Read more: Kevin Williams: <http://www.near-death.com/muslim.html>
[Islam's Views of Death and the Afterlife](#)
[Death & Dying: Islamic View](#)

Hinduism

The Upanishads, the ancient set of Hindu religious texts, postulated an eternal, changeless core of the self called as the "Atman." This soul or "deep self" was viewed as being identical with the unchanging godhead, referred to as Brahma (the unitary ground of being that transcends particular gods and goddesses). Untouched by the variations of time and circumstance, the Atman was nevertheless entrapped in the world of "samsara" (the cycle of death and rebirth). Unlike Western treatments of reincarnation, which tend to make the idea of coming back into body after body seem exotic, desirable, and even romantic, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other southern Asian religions portray the samsaric process as unhappy. Life in this world means suffering.

What keeps us trapped in the samsaric cycle is the law of karma. In its simplest form, this law operates impersonally like a natural law, ensuring that every good or bad deed eventually returns to the individual in the form of reward or punishment commensurate with the original deed. It is the necessity of "reaping one's karma" that compels human beings to take rebirth (to reincarnate) in successive lifetimes. In other words, if one dies before reaping the effects of one's actions (as most people do), the karmic process demands that one come back in a future life. Coming back in another lifetime also allows karmic forces to reward or punish one through the circumstances to which one is born. Hence, for example, an individual who was generous in one lifetime might be reborn as a wealthy person in the next incarnation.

"Moksha" is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths. In the southern Asian religious tradition, it represents the supreme goal of human strivings. Reflecting the diversity of Hinduism, liberation can be attained in a variety of ways, from the proper performance of certain rituals to highly disciplined forms of yoga. In the Upanishads, it is proper knowledge, in the sense of insight into the nature of reality, that enables the aspiring seeker to achieve liberation from the wheel of rebirth.

What happens to the individual after reaching moksha? In Upanishadic Hinduism, the individual Atman is believed to merge into the cosmic Brahma. A traditional image is that of a drop of water that, when dropped into the ocean, loses its individuality and becomes one with the sea. Although widespread, this metaphor does not quite capture the significance of this merger. Rather than losing one's individuality, the Upanishadic understanding is that the Atman is never separate from Brahma; hence, individuality is illusory, and moksha is simply waking up from the dream of separateness.

Along with heaven realms, Hinduism also developed notions of hell worlds in which exceptionally sinful individuals were punished. Many of the torments of Hindu hell worlds, such as being tortured by demons, resemble the torments of more familiar Western hells. Unlike Western hells, however, Hindu hell worlds are not final dwelling places. They are more like purgatories in which sinful souls experience suffering for a limited term. After the term is over, even the most evil person is turned out of hell to once again participate in the cycle of reincarnation.

Read more...Kevin Williams <http://www.near-death.com/hindu.html>
[Hinduism Today - Death & Dying](#)

Spiritualism/ Spiritism

says that all people and animals that have been loved (had their vibrations raised) such as pets, continue to live after physical death. On crossing over we take three things with us: our etheric or spirit body (a duplicate of our physical body) all memories and our character.

On crossing we go to a realm that will accommodate the vibrations we accumulated from all the thoughts and actions of our lifetime. Average decent people go to what is usually termed as the Third Realm. Those who have been willfully cruel and consistently selfish go to the darker, very unpleasant Astral regions because their level of vibrations would be much lower than the vibrations of the Third Realm.

Information transmitted from the other side tells us that the Third Realm is a place of enormous beauty, peace and light. There will be scope to continue to spiritually refine indefinitely. Those who earned it can progress to the fourth level, then the fifth, and sixth and so on. For humans we know that there are at least seven realms vibrating from the lowest to the highest - the higher the vibrations the more beautiful and better the conditions.

Spiritualists accept the Law of Progress- that those who are in the lower realms will one day slowly go upwardly towards the Realms of the Light even if it takes eons of time.

Unlike all other religions which require faith and belief (faith in a belief without evidence), Spiritualism/Spiritism is the only religion which is based on evidence and direct experience. Spiritism, briefly, is very similar to Spiritualism and is based on Allen Kardec's research - see below.

Spiritualism is the acceptance of empirically elicited evidence that the human consciousness survives physical death and that those who survive can communicate with those who are physically on earth in a number of ways. This communication can be made through at least twenty different empirically validated processes including mental, physical and direct voice mediumship, telepathy, xenoglossy, Electronic Voice Phenomena, Instrumental Trans-communication, Apparitions, Ouija Board, Death Bed Visions, Poltergeists (see A Lawyer Presents the Evidence for the Afterlife).

In addition, Spiritualists follow the universal law of cause and effect, accepting self responsibility and that the universe is governed by Mind, commonly called God.

Modern spiritualist movement began in 1848 in Hydesville, New York with the Fox sisters who demonstrated that spirits communicated with them by rapping on tables. The historical record is that finding of a skeleton in the basement where the Fox sisters used to live – as the spirit of a man who was murdered there had directed the Fox sisters to search by digging in the basement. The finding of the skeleton confirmed the rappings directed at the two Fox sisters. The murdered former resident of the house informed the Fox sisters who actually murdered him and the police caught the murderer. To-day, as it was in the past for thousands of years, millions of people around the world experience for themselves communication from the afterlife from their loved ones. Communication is now accepted world wide. Highly credible world famous scientists – see chapter 2 using their scientific skills regularly confirm this communication. Scientific testing is being done regularly on gifted mediums with great success. Some spiritualists organize themselves and have service meetings in Spiritualist Churches. Others call themselves Spiritualists without aligning with any formal organisation.

Spiritism is defined by Spiritist Doctrine as the collection of principles and laws, considered to be revealed by Superior Spirits, contained in the works of Allan Kardec, which constitute the Codification of Spiritism:

The Spirits' Book, The Mediums' Book, The Gospel According to Spiritism, Heaven and Hell and The Genesis According to Spiritism. A most credible spiritist definitive work on communication from the afterlife is by Alan Kardec The Spirits' Book.

More sites on Spiritualism/Spiritism

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritism>

<http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/kardec/>

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Spiritism.html><http://anomalyinfo.com/articles/ga00005.shtml>

<http://www.allan-kardec.info/> (more than fifteen million copies of Kardec's SPIRITS have been sold in more than 30 languages).

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**VIII. Three Questions for Comparing and Contrasting
the Afterlife Beliefs of Six Prominent World Religions**

by Jason David Gray

What survives the death of the body?

Christianity: There are straightforwardly dualistic conceptions for Christians (i.e. a non-physical soul that separates from the body at death), but there are also contrasting views. For instance, many believe that a spiritual body (which may be three dimensional and physical) is resurrected after death (but that the spiritual body is distinct from our current physical bodies). Many Christians continue to believe in literal resurrection of our earthly bodies.

Islam: There seems to be general agreement that, according to the Quran, the physical body is resurrected for the Day of Judgment, although a small minority appears to hold a dualistic view.

Judaism: Most modern Jews do not believe in post-mortem survival in any literal sense. However, orthodox Jews continue to believe that the physical body will be resurrected by God at the end of time. Some earlier versions of Judaism held dualistic views.

Mormonism: Mormons believe that we as humans are the embodiment of a material soul. This material soul exists eternally, to include the period before our birth as an embodied human. After death

minimally the material soul will continue to exist for all who die. However, for most the material soul will be re-embodied, not in the sense that the material soul will be reincarnated on earth, but it will be given a new body so that the embodied material soul can continue toward achieving the (God-like) perfection for which it is striving.

Buddhism: Buddhists do not believe in a soul. If one achieves nirvana nothing of that person survives their bodily death. However, if the person is to be reincarnated there are a couple of different views as to what survives. One of the oldest Buddhist traditions holds that only karma (or the worth of one's deeds) survives death and is transmitted to another physical body. Other traditions hold that sensations, emotions, perceptions and consciousness survive death and are transferred to another physical body, in the event of reincarnation.

Hinduism: Hindus also believe in reincarnation, and if one is to be reincarnated they believe that the subtle body survives death (the subtle body is a collection of our senses, actions, mind and intellect) and is transmitted to another physical body. If one is a Brahmin (a follower of the creator god and the unchanging essence of the universe) and is not to be reincarnated, then only the essential-self survives death. The essential-self is made of the same thing as Brahma, reunites with Brahma and so there is in effect no personal survival. If one devotes oneself to another god (e.g. Krishna), and is able to avoid reincarnation, then one joins with one's god in a way that preserves some personal identity, although what actually survives death in this case is a bit unclear (but presumably it is some variation of the subtle body, which allows for the retention of personal identity).

2. What punishment or reward awaits one in the afterlife?

Christianity: The most generally accepted view is that the resurrected person or the soul is destined for Heaven, a place of spiritual peace and union with God, or Hell, a place of everlasting torment. Catholics maintain that there is a third possible destination, Purgatory. Here the deceased is purified by fire for their forgivable sins and made ready to enter heaven.

Islam: Here there seems little controversy. The righteous are destined for Heaven, a place filled with God's love and represented in terms of physical delights. The damned are destined for Hell, a place of boiling fire and torment.

Judaism: According to some schools of thought only the righteous will be resurrected and taken into Heaven and rewarded with God's love. The damned will not be resurrected on this view. However, there were/are certain Jewish schools of thought which say that the righteous will go to Heaven and the

damned sentenced to eternal isolation from God's love. In Judaism there is relatively little historical mention of the more traditional notion of eternal torment by fire for the damned, unlike with the Christian and Islamic traditions.

Mormonism: Mormons do not believe in heaven and hell, per se. Rather they believe that the destination for the material soul is embodiment in one of three degrees of glory (these can be thought of as physical realms or kingdoms), or to remain disembodied in two forms of existence that are not recognizably human. The chief distinction between these kingdoms seems to be that in the highest kingdom (reserved for those who most scrupulously followed the Mormon faith) one retains the connections with family that one created on earth. In each of these kingdoms, however, the embodied material soul may progress toward a god-like state of intelligence (and in fact become a god). Those who remain dis-embodied are those who received a direct revelation from Jesus Christ but ignored it, or those who chose to follow Lucifer prior to the creation of the earth.

Buddhism: Either one is punished with reincarnation, in which case one is liable to be re-exposed to the source of all suffering, namely personal desire arising (in part) from having an embodied identity, or one achieves nirvana and is released from all personal desire by dissolving themselves and all their personal wants and cares.

Hinduism: Punishment occurs in the form of reincarnation. Those who have attained the proper karma, the proper knowledge, or have properly devoted themselves to a particular deity will avoid reincarnation and be rewarded by joining the essential unchanging nature of the universe (the Brahma), going temporarily to the world of the fathers, or by joining the deity to which they have been devoted (other than Brahma).

3. On what timeline do afterlife events occur?

Christianity: Christians who accept dualism and some who accept not-literal resurrection of earthly remains believe in immediate resurrection and judgment. However, many believe that the resurrection will not take place until the end of the world, after the return of Christ to earth and the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the end of earth as we know it.

Islam: Some Muslims believe that after death, immediately after being placed in the grave, the dead are questioned about the Islamic faith by two angels. If the deceased answers correctly they are left alone until the Day of Judgment. If they do not they are tormented by the angels in the grave. However, this belief does not have clear support in the Quran. What seems nearly universally accepted among

Muslims is that the world will end and at that time there will be a Day of Judgment in which the righteous will be admitted to heaven and the wicked damned for all eternity.

Judaism: As is the case with Muslims most Jews (viz. Orthodox Jews) who believe in an afterlife believe that the dead will be raised on a Day of Judgment at the end of time.

Mormonism: Mormons seem to believe in a judgment day for this earth in which the material souls of the dead will be given a kingdom (i.e. assigned a degree of glory) or left disembodied. However, Mormonism is utterly distinct from Islam and Christianity in that it, in a substantial sense, holds out the possibility of multiple judgment days. Because the Mormons believe the re-embodied material soul can itself progress to a god-like state of intelligence, they also believe that re-embodied souls can become gods and creators of their own worlds upon which they can pass judgment. So in the Mormon faith there may be only a single day of judgment for a given world, but there may end up being multiple gods and so multiple worlds, and thus multiple days of judgment.

Buddhism: The Buddhist timeline for afterlife events depends on the particular Buddhist tradition. Some Buddhist traditions believe that at the instant of death a new life is begun which has the exact same karma as the life that has ended. Other schools believe that there is a period between death and reincarnation, called an intermediate state, during which one may avoid reincarnation and still achieve nirvana. Achieving true nirvana is of necessity instantaneous, since it requires the complete dissolution of the self.

Hinduism: In Hinduism there is no apparent delay between death (which Hindus define as the separation of the subtle body from the physical body) and reincarnation, for those who have bad karma. Likewise, it seems that those whose karma is judged sufficient for escape from the cycle of rebirth are immediately joined with Brahma, arise in re-embodied form the World of the Fathers, or (in the case of devotees) join with their deity of devotion.

FOR MORE DETAILED EXPLANATIONS OF TECHNICAL TERMS (E.G. SUBTLE BODY, KARMA, ETC) OR PARTICULAR CONCEPTS (E.G. THE WORLD OF THE FATHERS), PLEASE SEE THE BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THAT SPECIFIC RELIGION.