



### Bridging the Gap

1. Professor Richard Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription*, pp. 98-99

Another common pentateuchal expression that may belong here is וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמֵּיהָ "that נפש shall be cut off from its kinsmen." In the thirteenth century, Ramban (Nahmanides) argued in his commentary to Lev 18:29 that expressions of this type imply that the נפש survives death:

You should know and understand that the forms of excision mentioned with reference to the נפש are a great (source for) trust in the existence of the נפש after death and in the granting of reward in the world of נשמות. For when He, blessed be He, says "and that נפש shall be cut off from the midst of its kin" (Num 15:30) or "that נפש shall be cut off from before Me" (Lev 22:3), it teaches that the נפש that sins is the one that shall be cut off—through its sin—but the other נפשות, which have not sinned, will exist before Him in the splendor on high. (Chavel tr.)

Ramban's discussion, which is rooted in ancient rabbinic exegesis, has been largely ignored by modern scholars... That this neglect is unjustified has been shown by Jacob Milgrom:

The other possible meaning of *kārēt* is that the punishment is indeed executed upon the sinner but only after his death: he is not permitted to rejoin his ancestors in the afterlife. . . . This meaning for *kārēt* is supported by the idiom that is its antonym: *ne < ʿšap < el* 'be gathered to one's [kin, fathers]'. . . . Particularly in regard to the patriarchs, the language of the Bible presumes three stages concerning their death: they die, they are gathered to their kin, and they are buried... all of which is evidence for a belief in the afterlife that permeated the ancient world and the concomitant fear that a wrathful deity might deprive man of this boon. (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation*)

2. Talmud, Chullin 142a

They taught in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov... If one's father told him to climb a building and bring back young birds, and he ascended, sent away the mother and took the young, and then upon his return he fell and died, what of his "length of days" and where would be the good due to him? Rather, "so that your days will be *aroch*" in the world that is entirely *aroch*, and "so that it will be good for you" in the world that is entirely good. But perhaps that [story] could not happen? Rabbi Yaakov saw this happen. But perhaps [the son] was thinking of sinning? Gd does not view thoughts as actions... Rather: The reward for mitzvot is not in this world.

Rav Yosef said: Had *Acher* learned that passage as his grandson Rabbi Yaakov did, he would not have sinned. What did he see? Some say he saw an event like the one just described. Others say he saw the tongue of Rabbi Chutzpit the Explicator, laid out in the trash. He said, "Will the mouth that produced pearls now lick the dust?!" But he did not know that "so that it will be good for you" is in the world that is entirely good, and that "so that your days will be *aroch*" is in the world that is entirely *aroch*.

### The Place of Reward

3. Talmud, Shabbat 152a

"One goes to the home of his world. (Ecclesiastes 12:5)" Rabbi Yitzchak explained: Each righteous person receives a dwelling befitting his honor.

4. Talmud, Ketuvot 77b

He went and found Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sitting on thirteen golden thrones.

5. Talmud, Shabbat 152b

The souls of the righteous are stored under the Divine Throne, as it is written, "The soul of my master should be bound in the bond of life. (Samuel I 25:29)"

6. Talmud, Bava Metzia 85a

Rabbi Yonatan said: Anyone who teaches his peer's child Torah will merit to sit in the Yeshiva above, as Jeremiah 15:19 says, "If you will return, I will bring you back, before Me you shall stand."

7. Talmud, Pesachim 53b

Anyone who gives a scholar merchandise [for business use] will merit to sit in the Yeshiva above, as Ecclesiastes 7:12 says, "For in the shade of wisdom, the shade of money."

8. Midrash Tannaim to Deuteronomy 5:15

Anyone who takes pleasure in Shabbat will merit to sit in the Yeshiva above, as Isaiah 58:14 says, "Then you will take pleasure in Gd."

9. Prof. Chaim Saiman, *Halakhah: The Rabbinic Idea of Law*, pg. 3

What we have seen here is surely not the only view of heaven in the Talmud, but it is a view of heaven that only the Talmud could fathom. And in a few short lines, the Talmud has told us quite a bit about how it understands both heaven and halakhah.

First, note how the natural state of halakhah is an argument about rules that have meaning regardless of whether they are used to decide a case. We can only presume that there are no mortals and certainly no lepers in heaven – and even if there were, G-d certainly knows whether blotch or hair came first. But the legal rule reflects something important beyond its applicability to a given case or controversy. That is why G-d and the angels debate these incredibly specific details.

The second point follows: law is something intrinsically worthy of study – so worthy and important that it is the central activity that takes place in heaven. To the Talmud, ultimate perfection is G-d and the angels arguing over the intricacies of halakhah.

10. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt), *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 4:9

When the physical entity, formed from the elements, disintegrates, and the *neshamah* is lost since it is not found outside the body and it needs the body for all of its actions, the *nefesh* still is not lost. It does not need the *neshamah* for its actions; it knows and understands intelligences which are separate from the material, and it knows Gd, and it lasts forever. This is what Solomon said, in his wisdom: "The dust will return to the earth, as it was, and the Ruach will return to the Gd who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)"

The Place of Punishment

11. Kings II 23:10

And he [King Yoshiyahu] contaminated Tophet, in Gei ben Hinom, to prevent people from passing their sons and daughters through the fire for Molech.

12. Jeremiah 7:31

And they built altars in the valley of Hinom, to burn their sons and daughters in fire.

13. Talmud, Eruvin 19a

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar said: Gehennom has three entrances – in the wilderness, in the sea, and in Jerusalem. In the wilderness as it is written, 'And they, and all they had, descended alive in She'ol.' In the sea as it is written, 'I cried out from the belly of She'ol, and You heard my voice.' In Jerusalem as it is written, 'The word of Gd, who has light in Zion and an oven in Jerusalem.' It was taught in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael – The light is Gehennom, and the oven is the entrance to Gehennom.

14. Talmud, Pesachim 54a

Our fire was created on the first Saturday night. The fire of Gehennom was created on the first Friday.

15. Talmud, Sanhedrin 64b

Why does the Torah mention variations on "Kareit" three times in relation to idolatry?...

"*veNichritah* And the soul will be cut off" – In this world, "*Hikaret* It will be cut off" – In the next world, and "*Tikaret* It will be cut off" – the Torah repeated its language, in the normal pattern of speech.

## 16. Talmud, Shabbat 152b

The souls of the righteous are stored under the Divine Throne, as it is written, 'The soul of my master should be bound in the bond of life,' and the souls of the wicked are imprisoned, and one *malach* stands at one end of the universe and the other at the other end, and they catapult these souls from one to the other, as it is written, 'And the souls of your enemies will be catapulted in the spoon of the catapult.'

### The Core Idea

## 17. Talmud, Sanhedrin 91a-b

Antoninus said to Rebbe: The body and soul could exempt themselves from judgment! How? The body could say, "The soul sinned, for since the day the soul left me I have been lying silently like a rock in my grave." The soul could say, "The body sinned, for since the day I left it I have been flying in the air like a bird."

Rebbe responded: I will compare this to a human king who had a beautiful orchard, in which there were beautiful new fruits. He put two guards into the orchard, one lame and one blind. The lame one said to the blind one, "I see beautiful new fruits in the orchard. Come put me on your shoulders, and we will bring the fruits and eat them."...

After some days, the owner of the orchard returned. He said, "Where are the beautiful new fruits?" The lame man replied, "Do I have legs to walk to them?" The blind man replied, "Do I have eyes to see?"

What did the owner do? He put the lame man on the blind man and punished them as one. So Gd brings the soul and puts it into the body, and He judges them together, as it is written, 'He will call to the heavens above and to the earth for the judgment of His nation.' 'He will call to the heavens above' refers to the soul, 'and to the earth for the judgment of His nation' refers to the body.

### Other Items

## 18. Talmud, Taanit 29a

It was taught: When evil Turnus Rufus destroyed the Temple, an edict for Rabban Gamliel's execution was issued. The Roman officer came into the study hall and said, "The one with the nose is sought, the one with the nose is sought!" Rabban Gamliel heard this and hid, and the officer came to him in secret.

The officer asked him, "If I save you, will you bring me into the next world?" Rabban Gamliel responded: Yes. He said, "Swear to me!" Rabban Gamliel swore. The officer went up to the roof, fell and died; we have learned that when they declare an edict and one of them dies, they annul the edict, and this is what happened then.

A voice came out of Heaven and said: That officer is prepared for the next world!

## 19. Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 16b-17a

There are three groups on the Day of Judgment: perfectly righteous, perfectly wicked, and intermediate. The perfectly righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed for eternal life, and the perfectly wicked are immediately inscribed and sealed for Gehennom, as Daniel 12 says, "And many of those who sleep in the dirt will awaken; these for eternal life, and these for humiliation and eternal shame." The intermediate descend to Gehennom and float and ascend, as Zechariah 13:9 says, "And I will bring the third in fire, and I will strengthen them as one strengthens silver, and I will test/purify them as one tests/purifies gold. He will call in My Name, and I will answer him." And regarding them Chanah said, "Gd kills and gives life, brings down to She'ol and brings up. (Samuel I 2)"

## 20. Get out of Gehennom free

- Traits: Humility and Reverence for Gd (Yevamot 102b); Fear of sin (Shabbat 140a)
- Deeds: Tzedakah (Gittin 7a); Looking after the ill (Nedarim 40a); Care reciting Shema (Berachot 15b)

### Review Questions

- Where does the idea of judgment, and posthumous reward and punishment, originate?
- What do the places of reward and punishment look like?
- What is the lesson of the parable of the blind and lame guards?
- Can non-Jews enter the next world?
- Is Gehennom a permanent destination?

