

# Jewish Life After Death

## A Womb for the Soul



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Imagine twin brothers in their mother's womb. How natural it would seem to be hunched over with one's head between one's legs. How commonplace to float all day in fluid. How mundane not to use one's nose or mouth, but rather to have air and food sent down a tube that passes directly into the stomach by way of the navel. And how long the "lifetime" of the nine-month gestation period. How unimaginable the existence of a world extending beyond the walls of the womb. Imagine that the two brothers possessed different world outlooks. One accepted by way of tradition that there was a future life beyond the womb. The other was a strict "empiricist," who accepted only that which he could see with his five senses. Accordingly, the latter brother acknowledged only the existence of "this world" alone, the world of the womb. Now, let us imagine that we had the ability to listen in on their conversation.

## The Conversation

"Brother," the believer says, "I believe that beyond this world is a magnificent realm which we will one day emerge into. In that spacious realm we will use our mouths for eating and our eyes for seeing unimaginable distances; we will hear with our ears; our legs will straighten out so that we will stand erect and traverse vast stretches of land replete with mountains, oceans, rivers—all beneath a limitless sky of starry hosts." "Brother," the empiricist twin replies, "you certainly are poetic. However, I am amazed at your naiveté. Why indulge in such fantasies? Only a fool believes in things beyond the rational mind's grasp." The first brother replies: "Why then do we have a mouth, eyes, and ears? They serve no purpose in this realm. They must have been designed for use in another world far beyond what we can visualize now." "You make it sound as if some higher intelligence designed us. Who says? Maybe the eyes and ears just developed randomly. We don't know anything about a higher intelligence or a world beyond. All we know is what we experience now." "If that is so, my brother, what do you believe is in store for us when we leave the womb?" "Simple and obvious. Once we are torn away from the tube through which our food and drink are provided we will fall into a dark abyss of nothingness. We will die, never to return. We might as well have never existed at all." Before the other brother can reply, the womb suddenly opens and the "naïve" brother slips outside. The remaining brother is

shattered. “Brother!” he cries in lament, “where are you? Do you know why you fell to your destruction? Your folly that these contractions were birth pangs caused your downfall. That is why you did not clutch at anything to stop yourself.” And then the lamenting brother hears the shrieks of his departed twin. To him that signals the end, the last gasp of his dying sibling. Outside, though, at that very moment, are shouts of joy. “Congratulations! Mazel Tov!” A new baby has just been born. [\[1\]](#)

## **How Do You View Your Life?**

How do you view your life? Is it nothing more than what you see? Or do you see it as a “gestation period” leading to the birth of a higher self? “The length of our years are 70; and if we are strong, 80...” (Psalms 90:10) Time is ticking away, the seconds never to return. Time’s incessant march will leave in its wake only death: the death of a past that will never come again. A materialistic person does not live for 70 or 80 years—he dies for 70 or 80 years. At the same time, each of us has a soul. And that soul originates from—and at some level will always remain connected to—the realm of the Godly, a realm above materialism, above time, above these 70 or 80 years of death. The soul is our connection to life, perpetual life. Are our years an end unto themselves? Or are they a gestation period for a future birth? Are they a path to the grave or a doorway to the self? This is the basic question each of us must ask in life. Are we living for our bodies or our souls?

## **The Corridor**

Our Sages tell us that this life is a corridor to the next life. Death is a birth to a new existence. Just as emergence from the womb constitutes corporeal birth, detachment from the body is the birth of the soul. Just as the eight or nine months in the womb are the period of gestation preceding earthly birth, the 70 or 80 years on earth are the gestation period preceding heavenly birth. Life then is a womb for the soul. Like a womb its value is not what it is but rather what it brings into existence. If it brings into existence the seed of eternity, if it nourishes and nurtures the impregnated egg of the Godly, then it is truly life. If, on the other hand, it exists for itself and is hollowed of anything other than the walls of its own temporary existence, then it cannot really be called life. It is only a vestibule of death. A tomb for dust and ashes. How do you view your life? Am I congruent to the needs of my soul or am I submerged in the base passions of my body? Where am I holding? There is probably no single more important question you can ask yourself because the way you answer it will perforce have the greatest possible repercussions.

## **A Day for Deciding**

That question is so important that God made it the central theme of a day which sets the stage for our entire year. On Rosh Hashana our Creator opens “the books of life and the books of death” to see where we are holding. (Actually He does that to get us to look deep inside ourselves in order to get us to see where we are holding.) If we are found worthy, then we will be inscribed in the book of life. If not, then we will be inscribed in the book of death. In either event, the truth is that the decision is made by us; we are the ones who inscribe ourselves for life or death by living our lives throughout the year the way we do. We are the ones who give birth to ourselves. In the

next world our birth and the nature of our experience will reflect the choices we—and we alone—made. In this life we were born into circumstances beyond our control, but in the next life we will emerge from the “womb” of circumstances we shaped with our daily life choices and actions. If we are true to our soul here, then our soul will experience a happy birth in the next world. If we succumb to the low impulses of the material body we will be confused and dismayed when we emerge into the wide space of eternity. Rosh Hashana is a trial, a Day of Judgment. Where are you holding? Are you in line with your soul-self? At the very least, do you yearn to be in line with your soul-self? Or have you become lazy, weighed down with emotions of anger and bitterness over your own petty material concerns? That is the question. And the way you answer it will have a great impact on the verdict.

## **FOOTNOTES:**

[1]The entire allegory is adapted from Y. M. Tucazinsky’s, “Geshet Hachaim” (in Hebrew) translated in English as “[The Bridge Of Life.](#)”

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