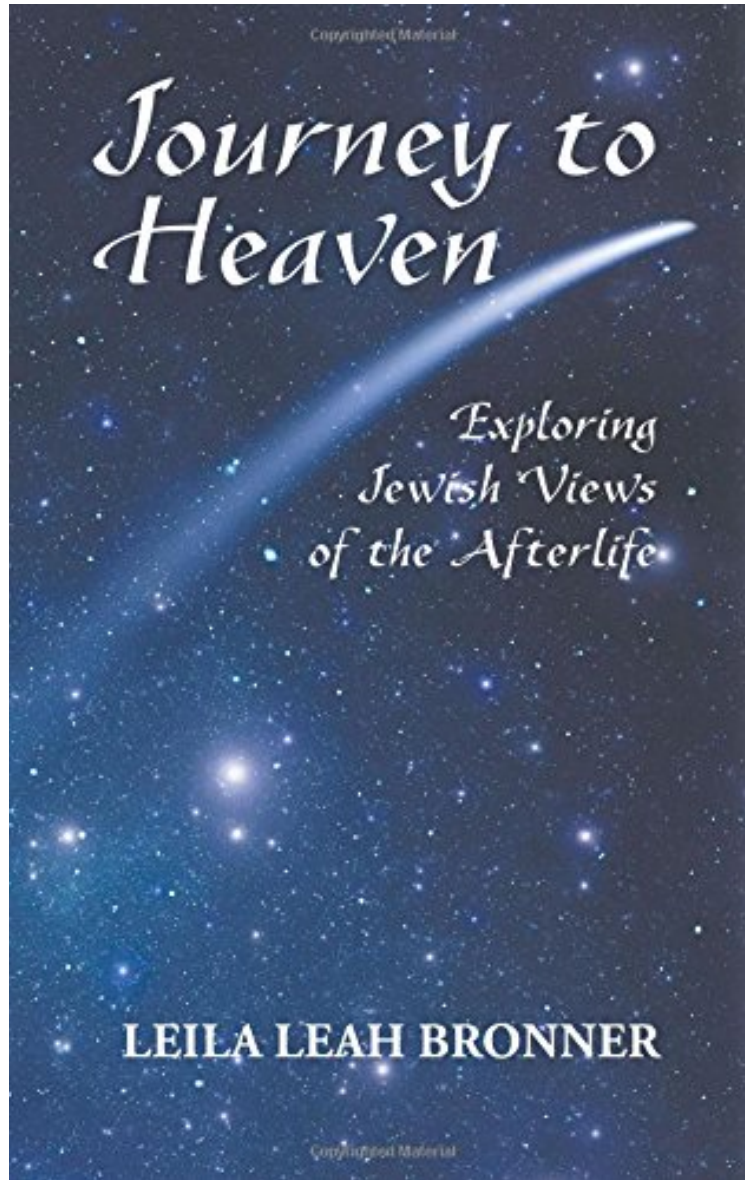


(Download ebook) Journey to Heaven: Exploring Jewish Views of the Afterlife

Journey to Heaven: Exploring Jewish Views of the Afterlife

Leila Leah Bronner

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Leila Leah Bronner : Journey to Heaven: Exploring Jewish Views of the Afterlife before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Journey to Heaven: Exploring Jewish Views of the Afterlife:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. xploring Jewwish views of heavenBy William B.Very informative concerning the subject!12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A view that the afterlife is a biblical

teachingBy Israel DrazinMany scholars take the position that no book of the Hebrew Bible, with the possible exception of the late second century BCE Daniel 12:2-3, speaks about life after death, and are convinced that the various ideas about the after-life were taken from pagan notions. Daniel states that "those who sleep in the dust will awake." This may refer to the people as a whole who will be able to defeat their Syrian Greek oppressors and be a free nation again. Be this as it may, the second century BCE was the first time that this concept entered Judaism as a view of the Pharisees, and it was strongly objected to by the more conservative Sadducees. Dr. Bronner, a professor at several prominent universities, takes an opposite view. She sees frequent references to an afterlife in the early biblical books, including the Five Books of Moses, and she details, with full quotes, what these sources say. She describes the growth of these beliefs in post-biblical discussions about life after death, the world to come, heaven, hell, judgment, resurrection, and reincarnation. She introduces readers to books such as the apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha. She discusses the views of rabbis, philosophers, and mystics. She feels that the Torah is speaking about an afterlife when it mentions "Sheol" some sixty five times and when it uses synonyms like "the pit" and "the hidden place," although others define these terms as the grave. She sees phrases like "gathered to one's people" and "sleeping with his fathers" as a "belief in some kind of existence after death," while others read them as beautiful metaphors for "he died." She also reads the belief in life after death in six verbs, depending, of course, on the context: awaken, arise, take, stand up, return, and live. Everyone agrees that the afterlife is explicitly mentioned in the post-biblical books, written after 200 BCE, although different books offer different ideas. Dr. Bronner cites these opinions and the history of the times that prompted them, the hope that Jews would no longer be oppressed. She compares the Jewish versions to the Greek from where they were taken, especially the concept that only good people will have an afterlife; the Greeks gave it to everyone. She also discusses the afterlife as it appears in the Mishnah and Talmuds, infrequently. Remarkably, contrary to the belief held by most very Orthodox Jews, the Talmud does not say that a person should spend his day studying Torah and that he would be awarded for the study with the afterlife. It says instead that Torah should lead to proper behavior, and it is the proper behavior that assures an afterlife. Many people think that the most unusual idea about the afterlife is the notion of reincarnation, also called "transmigration of souls," "metempsychosis," and gilgul, a Hebrew term meaning "circularity," the belief that when people die, their souls are transferred to another person, animal, vegetation, or even a rock. Reincarnation did not appear in Judaism until it was mentioned in the mystical book Sefer ha-Bahir, which scholars date to the twelfth century. It is a mystical notion, alien to rational Judaism. Nachmanides the mystic (1194-1270) liked the idea. It later became widely accepted and was expanded in the late thirteenth century mystical book Zohar. In the Zohar, reincarnation is sometimes a punishment, but it is also a process whose goal is purification. People who do not behave properly live again after their death and are given another chance. Some believed that people were only given three chances. If they continued to fail, they were sent to hell. Others thought that more than three chances were given. Some mystics, such as the sixteenth century Isaac Luria, were convinced that multiple souls can inhabit a person because family members want to stick together. Many Jews, who do not realize the late appearance of the idea of reincarnation into Judaism and that it is mystical and not rational, incorrectly think that this is a basic Jewish teaching. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Journey through Jewish thought on the AfterlifeBy R SafmanThis fascinating book traces the journey that Jewish thought has taken since biblical times in its understanding of what happens after we die. The writing is both elegant and clear, with the author's formidable erudition presented in a manner that's remarkably easy to understand for the layperson, whether he or she is Jewish, Christian, agnostic or simply curious. Journey to Heaven starts by examining the earliest references to resurrection in the Hebrew Bible. From there, it moves on, across the centuries, to Second Temple-period sources (eg the Wisdom of Solomon), which include some of the first Jewish references of the immortality of the soul. The Talmud, it turns out, has some very interesting things to say on the "World to Come." In the Middle Ages, the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) added a new element to Jewish thinking on the afterlife: reincarnation. Kabbalistic thought had a profound influence on the Hassidic movement - for instance, in the story of the Dybbuk. During the Holocaust, a deep faith in the afterlife provided solace to rabbis and laypeople alike in their final moments. Since the Enlightenment, belief in the afterlife has taken a drubbing from rationalism and a generally skeptical approach to faith. In our time, though, many people are once again open to traditional approaches to the next world - and to its implications for the meaning of life in this world. Journey to Heaven is a great introduction to the development of Jewish thought on "the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn no traveller returns," as Shakespeare called it in Hamlet.

A number of the basic tenets of Jewish belief regarding the afterlife, resurrection, immortality, judgment, messianism, and the world to come are laid out in this fascinating and accessible volume. Beginning with the Bible's references to Sheol and its allusions to resurrection, this survey explores immortality and bodily resurrection in Second Temple literature; the Mishnah's discussions of *olam ha-ba*, or the world to come, and how to merit entry into it; and the Talmud's depictions of paradise and hell, and the souls' journey through these metaphysical landscapes. The book also explores the views of medieval scholars such as Maimonides and Nahmanides, Jewish mystical teachings about reincarnation, and modern views of faith and belief, as well as the evolving view of the Messiah over the course of

Jewish history. This absorbing study demonstrates that the afterlife is indeed a vital part of Judaism as it reveals how generations of Jews, from biblical times to the present, have grappled with the core ideas and beliefs about the hereafter.

Is it bodily resurrection or immortality of the soul, reincarnation or transmigration? Leila Bronner has written a fascinating analysis of the afterlife in Judaism, tracing its mysteries from earliest biblical texts...to post-Holocaust views.... Adding her own creative insights and sociological analyses to the mix, she presents a highly readable, erudite exposition that brings clarity, knowledge--and life--to an elusive, oft-neglected concept in Judaism. --Blu Greenberg, author of *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* Conversant with Jewish writings throughout the ages, Dr. Bronner is a gifted writer with an uncanny ability to trace the major Jewish beliefs in an afterlife through the ages, recognize nuances and tensions, and present the reader with lucid formulations. The ideas of bodily resurrection, immortality of the soul, reincarnation, the World to Come, and the Messiah have continuously suffused Judaism and are still with us. A fascinating book. --Professor Bezalel Porten, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

In her compelling and widely encompassing *Journey to Heaven*, Bronner succeeds in elucidating an area in which many angels feared to tread. With scholarship and commitment, she has provided an historical textual study of the ideas concerning the afterlife. Since death touches each of us throughout our lives and eventually brings every one of us into its domain, there can be no topic of greater interest and significance. Bronner is to be congratulated for giving us the challenge and the comfort of the fruits of her scholarship. --Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat

About the Author
Leila Leah Bronner is a noted community activist, professor and writer. She is a former professor of Bible and Jewish history at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, as well as former visiting scholar at Bar Ilan University in Israel, Harvard University, and Yeshiva University's Institute of Adult Studies in New York. She is the author of several books, including *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women and Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible*. She lives in Los Angeles.