

CHAPTER XLIV

THE IMMORTAL SOUL OF MAN

1. The idea of immortality has been found in Scripture in a rather obscure and probably corrupt passage,¹ "In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death." In the same spirit Aquila, the Bible translator, who belonged to the school of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, renders the equally obscure passage from the Psalms,² "He will lead us to immortality," reading *al maveth*, the Al with *Alef*, for *al muth*, the Al with *Ayin*. There is more solid foundation for the view that the verse, "God created man in His own image" implies that there is an imperishable divine essence in man. In fact, that which distinguishes man from the animal as well as from the rest of creation, both the starry worlds above and the manifold forms of life on earth about him, is his self-conscious personality, his ego, through which he feels himself akin with God, the great world-ruling *I Am*. This self-conscious part of man, which lends to his every manifestation its value and purpose, can no more disappear into nothingness than can God, who called into existence this world with all its phenomena, who set it in motion and directs it. Whatever thought the crudest of men may have of his ego, his self,³ or however the most learned scholar may explain the marvelous action and interaction of physical and psychical or spiritual

¹ Prov. XII, 28, comp. LXX, and see Kittel: *Bibl. Hebr.*, note.

² Ps. XLVIII, 15; see Kittel, note; Midr. Teh. to Psalms and note by Buber; Yer. Meg. II, 73 b; M. K. 83 b; Lev. R. XI, 9.

³ See Tylor: *Primitive Culture*, Index, s. v. Soul.

forces which culminates in his own self-conscious personality, it appears certain that this ego cannot cease to be with the cessation of the bodily functions. There is in us something divine, immortal, and the only question is wherein it may be found.

2. The creation of man which is described in the Bible in the words, "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"¹ corresponds to the child-like conceptions of a primitive people. On the other hand, Scripture speaks of death in parallel terms, "The dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit (Ruah, the life-giving breath) returneth unto God who gave it."²

The conception that the soul enters into man as the breath of life and leaves him at his death, flying toward heaven like a bird,³ is quite as ancient and as universal as the other, that the soul descends into the nether world as a shadowy image of the body, there to continue a dull existence. The two are related to one another, and in the Bible, as well as in the literature of other peoples, they have given rise to diverse definitions of the soul. This was the point of departure for the development of the conception of immortality in one or the other direction, according to whether the body was considered a part of the personality which somehow survives after death, or only the spiritual substance of the soul was thought to live on in celestial regions as something divine. The former led to the theory of the resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul; the latter to the belief in a future life for the soul, after it had been separated or released from the body.

3. When once the soul was felt to be a "lamp of the Lord," filling the body with light when man is awake,⁴ it was easy to imagine that the soul had escaped and temporarily returned

¹ Gen. II, 7.

² See J. E., art. Birds as Souls.

³ Eccl. XII, 7.

⁴ Prov. XX, 27.

to God in sleep. This induced the teachers of the Synagogue to prescribe a morning prayer of thanks which reads, "Blessed art Thou, O God, who restorest the souls unto dead bodies."¹ The conception underlying this prayer throws light upon the entire belief in resurrection. Death to the pious is only a prolonged sleep. On that account the prophet in the passage from Isaiah already referred to, as well as the Hasidic author of the Book of Daniel,² could express the hope that "those who sleep in the dust shall awake." As at every awakening from sleep in the morning, so at the great awakening in the future, the souls which have departed in death shall return again to their bodies. These bodies could then hardly be conceived of as subject to decomposition, and the picture in Ezekiel's vision of resurrection³ had to be accepted as fact. Still R. Simeon b. Yohai in the especially instructive thirty-fourth chapter of Pirke de R. Eliezer assumes the complete disintegration of the body, in order to render the miracle of resurrection so much the greater. Later still arose the legend of an indestructible bone of the spinal column, called *Luz*, which was to form the nucleus for the revival of the whole body.⁴ The name *Luz*, which denotes an almond tree and is the name given in the Bible to a city also,⁵ seemed to point to a connection with two legends, a fabulous city into which death could not enter,⁶ and the tree of resurrection in the Osiris cycle.⁷

4. Still, no clear, consistent view of the soul prevailed as yet in the rabbinic age. The popular belief, influenced by Persian notions, was that the soul lingers near the body for a certain time after it has relinquished it, either from three to seven days or for an entire year.⁸ Furthermore it was said that after death the souls hovered between heaven and earth

¹ Ber. 60 b; Singer's *Prayerb.*, 5.

³ Ezek. XXXVII, 1 f.

⁵ Judg. I, 26.

⁷ Brugsch: *Religion u. Mythologie d. alt. Aegypten*, p. 618, 634.

⁸ P. d. R. El. XXXIV.

² Isa. XXVI, 19; Dan. XII, 2.

⁴ Eccl. R. XII, 5: J. E., art. *Luz*.

⁶ Sota 46 b.

in the form of ghosts, able to overhear the secrets of the future decreed above and to betray them to human beings below. In fact, the rabbis of the Talmud, especially the Hasidim, never hesitated to accept these ghost stories.¹ Some sages of the Talmudic period taught that the souls of the righteous ascend to heaven, there to dwell under the throne of the divine majesty, awaiting the time of the renewal of the world, while the souls of the godless hovered over the horizon of the earth as restless demoniacal spirits, finally to succumb to the fate of annihilation, after they had been cast down into the fiery pit of Gehenna or Sheol.² Of course, this view, which prevails in both the Talmud and the New Testament, according to which the souls of the wicked are to be consumed in the fire of Gehenna, is inconsistent with the conception of the purely spiritual nature of the soul.

Nevertheless at this same epoch we find the higher idea expressed that the soul is an invisible, god-like essence, pervading the body as a spiritual force and differing from it in nature in much the same way as God is differentiated from the world.³ "Thou wishest to know where God dwells, who is as high as are the heavens above the earth; tell me then where dwells thy soul, which is so near," replied R. Gamaliel to a heathen.⁴ The prevailing view of the schools is that God implants the soul in the embryo while in the mother's womb, together with all the spiritual potentialities which make it human. In fact, R. Simlai, the third-century Haggadist, advances the Platonic conception of the preëxistence of the soul, as a being of the highest intelligence, which sees before birth all things throughout the world, but forgets all at birth, so that all subsequent learning is only a recollection.⁵ In Hellenistic Judaism especially the doctrine seems to have been general of the preëxistence of the soul, or of the creation of all human souls simulta-

¹ Ber. 18 b.

² Shab. 152 b.

³ Midr. Teh. Ps. CIII, 1.

⁴ Sanh. 39 b.

⁵ Nid. 30 b.

neously with the creation of the world.¹ Of course, the soul which emanates from a higher world must be eternal.

5. The first clear idea of the nature of the soul came with the philosophically trained thinkers, who were dependent either on Plato, main founder of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, or on Aristotle, who ascribes immortality only to the creative spirit of God, the supreme Intelligence as a cosmic power. The nearest approach to Plato was Philo,² who saw in the three Biblical names for the soul, *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *ne-shama*, the three souls of the Platonic system, — the sensuous soul, which has its seat in the abdomen; the courageous or emotional soul, situated in the breast; and the intellectual soul, which dwells in the brain and contains the imperishable divine nature. This last is kept in its physical environment as in a prison or a grave, and ever yearns for liberation and reunion with God. The soul of the righteous enters the world of angels after death; that of the wicked the world of demons.

Saadia, who was under the influence of Aristotle interpreted from the neo-Platonic viewpoint, did not share the Platonic dualism of matter and spirit, nor did he divide the soul into three parts, seated in various parts of the human body. He finds the soul to be a spiritual substance created simultaneously with the body, and uniting the three forces of the soul distinguished in Scripture into one inseparable whole, the seat of which is in the heart, — wherefore soul and heart are often synonymous in the Bible. This indivisible substance possesses a luminous nature like that of the spheres, but is simpler, finer, and purer than they, and endowed with the power of thought. It was created by God out of the primal ether from which He made the angels, simultaneously with the body and

¹ B. Wisd. VIII, 19; Slav. Enoch XXII, 4, comp. Bousset, l. c., 313 f.

² Philo: Leg. All. III, 38; Migrat. Abrah. 12; De Concupiscentia, 2; De Fortitudine, 3; Drummond: *Philo*, I, 318 f.; Bentwich: *Philo*, 178, 181; Windelband-Tufts on Plato, 123 f., on Philo, 231, comp. Bousset, l. c., 508; Rhode: *Psyche*, 557 f.

within it. By this union it was qualified to display that moral activity prescribed for it in the divine teaching, the neglect of which would defile and tarnish it. According to Saadia some kind of material substance adheres to the soul as well as to the angels, and on that account he does not hesitate to accept the Talmudic expressions about the abode of the soul after death, or the last judgment which is to take place as soon as the appointed number of souls shall have made their entrance into their earthly bodies, when the souls of the righteous will have their angelic nature recognized, and those of the wicked will have their lower character revealed. However, Saadia combats with so much greater fervor the Hindu teaching of metempsychosis, which had been adopted by Plato and Pythagoras.¹

Bahya connects his theory with the three souls of Plato, and likewise ascribes to the soul an ethereal essence.² He holds that its destiny is to raise itself to the order of the angels through self-purification, and finally to return to God as the divine Source of light. To this end the intellectual soul, which has its being from the primal light, must overcome the lower sensuous soul which leads to sin.

6. The conception that the soul is a substance derived from the luminous primal matter, like the heavenly spheres and the angels, was now persistently retained by the Jewish thinkers, who explained thereby its immortality. In adopting the Aristotelian theory that the soul is the form-principle of the body, the Platonic doctrine of its preëxistence was gradually relinquished, and its existence ascribed to a creative act of God at the birth of the child or at its conception. But Jehuda ha-Levi, the most pious of all the philosophers, emphasized vigorously the indivisibility of the soul, its incorporeality and

¹ *Emunoth*, Ch. VI; Schmiedl, l. c., 135 f.; Neumark, l. c., I, 536 f.; Husik, l. c., 376.

² Neumark, l. c., 495; Husik, l. c., 108 f.; J. E., art. Bahya.

its reality apart from the condition of the body, and — in opposition to the Aristotelian free-thinkers, who expected the human soul to be absorbed into the divine soul, the active intellect, — he declared the immortality of the individual a fundamental article of faith.¹

Now some of the Jewish thinkers, following Jehuda ha Levi, Ibn Daud, and others, though Aristotelians, shrank from the logical conclusion of denying all individuality to the soul, and attributed to it rather a process of purification, which ends with the elevation of the soul-essence to angelic rank and thus guarantees its immortality. Not so Maimonides, who accepted with inexorable earnestness the Aristotelian idea of form as the perfection of matter. The essence of the human soul is, for him, that force or potentiality which qualifies it for the highest development of the intellect, and is alone capable of grasping the divine. Yet it can acquire a part in the creative World-spirit only in the same degree as it unfolds this potentiality to share the divine intellect, whose seat is the highest sphere of the universe. By dint of this acquired intelligence it can live on as an independent intellect, in the image of God, and thus attain beatitude in the contemplation of Divinity.²

7. Naturally the view of Maimonides, that a certain measure of immortality is granted only to the wise, — though they must be morally perfect as well, — aroused great opposition. Hasdai Crescas proves its untenableness by asking, "Why shall the wise alone share in immortality? Furthermore, how can something that came into existence in the course of human life suddenly acquire eternal duration? Or how can there be any bliss in the knowledge of God where there is no personality,

¹ *Cuzari*, V, 12. See Cassel, notes; Schmiedl, l. c., 141; Neumark, l. c., 561; Husik, l. c., 179 f.

² Schmiedl, l. c., 149; Neumark, l. c., 536 f., 551, 558, 573, 586; Husik, l. c., 281 f. Comp. Scheyer: *d. Psychol. Syst. d. Maim.*; Simon, *Aspects of the Hebrew Genius*, 75-78, 86.

no self-conscious ego to enjoy it?" Therefore Crescas ascribed to the soul an indestructible spiritual essence whose perfection is attained, not by mere intellect or knowledge, but by love of God manifested in a religious and moral life, and which is thereby made to share in eternal bliss.¹

8. All these various thinkers find the future life either expressed or suggested in the Scriptures as a truth based upon reason. This is especially the conception of Abraham ibn Daud, who, contrary to his Aristotelian successor Maimonides, sees in self-consciousness, by which the soul differentiates itself from the body as a personality, the proof that it cannot be subject to dissolution with the body.²

Besides the philosophic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, however, the traditional belief in the resurrection of the body demanded some consideration on the part of these philosophers. Saadia defends the latter with all his might, endeavoring to reconcile the two as best he can.³ All the rest leave us in doubt whether resurrection is to be understood literally or symbolically. Maimonides especially involves himself in difficulties, inasmuch as in his commentary on the Mishna he considers the resurrection of the dead an unalterable article of faith, whereas in his Code⁴ and in the *Moreh* he speaks only of immortality; and again before the end of his life he wrote, obviously in self-defense, a work which seems to favor bodily resurrection, yet without clarifying his conceptions at any time.⁵ The belief in resurrection had taken too deep a root in the Jewish consciousness and had been too firmly established through the liturgy of the Synagogue for any philosopher to touch it without injuring the very foundations of faith.

¹ *Or Adonai*, II, 6; Joel: "*Crescas*"; Husik, l. c., 400.

² *Emunah Ramah*, 39; Husik, l. c., 259 b.

³ *Emunoth*, VII.

⁴ *H. Teshubah*, VIII, 2.

⁵ *Maamar Tehiyyath ha Metim*, see Schmiedl, l. c., 172.

Moreover, beside external caution a certain inner need seems to have impelled toward the acceptance of resurrection. As soon as one thinks of the soul as existing or continuing to live in an incorporeal state, one is involuntarily led toward the belief in the soul's preëxistence or even in the possibility of metempsychosis. Thus it seemed more reasonable to believe in a new formation of the human body together with a new creation of the world. Therewith came the disposition to assign to the soul in the future world a body of finer substance, like that assumed by the mystic Nahmanides,¹ in order to assure to the new humanity a wondrous duration of life like that of Elijah.

9. While the popular philosopher Albo rightly declares that the nature of the soul is as far beyond all human understanding as is the nature of God,² the mystics sought all the more to penetrate its secrets. The Cabbalah also divides the soul into three different substances according to the three Biblical names, assigning their origins to the three different spheres of the universe, and reiterating the Platonic theory of the preëxistence of the soul and its future transmigration. This division into three parts provided scope for all types of theories concerning the soul in its sensuous, its moral, and its intellectual nature. Fundamentally the Cabbalah considered the soul an emanation from the divine intellect with a luminous character just like the philosophers. But in the Platonic view of the ascending order of creation, which forms the basis of the Cabbalah, this mundane life is an abyss of moral degradation, so that the soul yearns toward the primal Source of light, finally to find freedom and bliss with God.³ Thus the later Cabbalah returned to the teachings of Philo, the Jewish Plato, for whom death was only the stripping off of the earthly frame in order to enter the pure and luminous world of God.

¹ In *Schaar ha Gemul*.

² *Ikkarim*, IV, 35.

³ *Zohar*, I, 96 b; *Yalk. Reubeni* to Deut. XIX, 2; J. E., art. Cabala.

10. With Moses Mendelssohn, who in his *Phædon* tried to translate Plato's proof of immortality into modern terms, a new attitude toward the nature and destiny of the soul arose in Judaism among both the philosophers and the educated laity. Mendelssohn not only endeavored to prove the immortality of the soul through its indivisibility and incorporeality, as all the neo-Platonists and Jewish philosophers had done before him; he also attempted to show from the harmonious plan which pervades and controls all of God's creation, that the soul may enter a sphere of existence greater in extent and content than the little span of earthly life which it relinquishes. The progress of the soul toward its highest unfolding, unsatisfied in this life, demands a future growth in the direction of god-like perfection.¹ At this point the philosopher enters the province of faith, and thus furnishes for all time the cardinal point of the belief in immortality. The divine spirit in man, which is evinced in the self-conscious, morally active personality, bears within itself the proof and promise of its future life. Moreover, this corresponds with the belief in God as One who rules the world for the eternal purposes and aims of perfection, who cannot deceive the hope of the human heart for a continued living and striving onward and forward, without thereby impairing His own perfection. For we all close our lives without having attained the goal of moral and spiritual perfection toward which we strive; and therefore our very nature demands a world where we may reach the higher degree of perfection for which we long. In this sense we may interpret the Psalmist's verse: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with (beholding) Thy likeness."² That is: our spirit, when no longer bound to the earth, shall behold the divine glory, — a vision which transcends our powers of thought.

11. In the light of modern investigation, body and soul are seen to be indissolubly bound together by a reciprocal relation

¹ See Kayserling: *Moses Mendelssohn*, 148 ff.

² Ps. XVII, 15.

which either benefits or impedes them both. Wherein the spiritual bond exists that renders both the physical organs with their muscular and nervous systems and the magnetic or electric currents which set them in motion subservient to the will of the intellect; what the mind actually *is*, into whose deepest recesses science is casting its search-light to illumine its processes, — these are problems which will probably remain ever incapable of solution by human knowledge, and will therefore always afford new food for the imagination. Yet it is just in periods like ours, when the belief in God is weakening, that the human spirit is especially solicitous to guard itself against the thought of the complete annihilation of its god-like self-conscious personality. This gives rise to the superstitious effort to spy out the soul by sensory means and to find ways of seeing or hearing the spirits of the dead, — a tendency which is as dangerous to the spiritual and moral welfare of humanity as was the ancient practice of necromancy.¹ It is therefore all the more important to base the belief in immortality solely on the God-likeness of the human soul, which is the mirror of Divinity. Just as one postulate of faith holds that God, the Creator of the world, rules in accordance with a moral order, so another is the immortality of the human soul, which, amidst yearning and groping, beholds God. The question where, and how, this self-same ego is to continue, will be left for the power of the imagination to answer ever anew.

12. Certainly it is both comforting and convenient to imagine the dead who are laid to rest in the earth as being asleep and to await their reawakening. As the fructifying rain awakens to a new life the seeds within the soil, so that they rise from the depths arrayed in new raiment, so, when touched by the heavenly dew of life, will those who linger in the grave arise to a new existence, clad in new bodies. This is the belief which inspired the pious founders of the synagogal

¹ See J. Jastrow: *Fact and Fable in Psychology*.

liturgy even before the period of the Maccabees, when they expressed their praise of God's power in that He would send the fertilizing rain upon the vegetation of the earth, and likewise in due time the revivifying dew upon the sleeping world of man. Both appeared to the sages of that age to be evidences of the same wonder-working power of God. Whoever, therefore, still sees God's greatness, as they did, revealed through miracles, that is, through interruptions of the natural order of life, may cling to the traditional belief in resurrection, so comforting in ancient times. On the other hand, he who recognizes the unchangeable will of an all-wise, all-ruling God in the immutable laws of nature must find it impossible to praise God according to the traditional formula as the "Reviver of the dead," but will avail himself instead of the expression used in the Union Prayer Book after the pattern of Einhorn, "He who has implanted within us immortal life."¹

¹ Singer's *Prayerb.*, 45. The Rabb. Conf. of Philadelphia in 1869 passed the resolution: "The belief in the Resurrection of the Body has no religious foundation (in Judaism), and the doctrine of Immortality refers to the after-existence of the Soul only." Comp. D. Philipson: *l. c.*, p. 489 and 492.