

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## *Does the Soul Survive? 2nd Edition: A Jewish Journey to Belief in Afterlife, Past Lives & Living with Purpose*

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### **Introduction**

As a juror, how would you assess evidence to reach a verdict? What is the role of fellow jurors in reaching your conclusions?

What is an example of “because you want it to be true does not mean that it is false”?

Have you had a telepathic experience? If so, describe. Do you know someone that you trust who claims that they have had such an experience? If so, describe.

### **1. Telepathy: A Window on the Soul’s Survival**

Have you had any unusual experiences around the death of a loved one? If so, describe.

Have you ever had an experience of knowing of the death of a loved one even before you were told? Or do you know anyone who has? If so, what significance do you give the account?

### **2. Near-Death Experiences (NDEs): The Literature**

Have you ever had a near-death experience? If so, describe the experience and its impact on your worldview.

Had you heard about NDEs before? If so, what did you know?

What are your questions about this phenomenon?

### **3. What Is *Soul*?**

What is *soul*? What is its relationship to the body?

Describe how you understand Rabbi Isaac Luria’s five levels of soul.

Do you believe that the soul exists independently of the body? Why or why not?

### **4. Survival of the Soul: Judaism’s Views**

What are some definitions of *olam habah*, “the afterlife”?

What does a non-Jew need to do to attain *olam habah*, according to Judaism?

Why do you think the Torah says so little describing the afterlife?

## **5. What Happens After I Die?**

Describe the seven phases of purification after death according to the Jewish mystics. How do you react to these phases?

What are the similarities between the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the *Zohar*? How do you account for these similarities?

What are the human limitations in knowing what happens after we die?

## **6. Traditional Judaism on Resurrection of the Dead**

What is resurrection of the dead?

What are the biblical proof texts? Do you find them compelling?

How did Maimonides understand the nature of resurrection of the dead?

How do you react to the idea of the resurrection of your body?

## **7. Past-Life Regression: An Introduction**

How is reincarnation different from resurrection? Can you conceive of how the two ideas can coexist?

What stands out to you about Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's hypnotic regression of his subject? Do you judge the material elicited as actual memory?

Do you know anyone who claims to have past life memories? If so, describe.

## **8. Training with Dr. Brian Weiss**

What are your initial reactions to Brian Weiss's description of the efficacy of eliciting past-life memory? (I recommend reading *Many Lives, Many Masters*, of course, before forming too strong an opinion.)

What are your questions for Brian Weiss?

## **9. Reincarnation: Judaism's Views**

What are your beliefs about reincarnation?

Did you know that reincarnation had a mainstream place in Judaism?

Who was Isaac Luria and what is the impact of his teaching on Jewish mysticism?

How do you relate to Luria's teaching about reincarnation?

Describe the place of reincarnation in the prayer recited before sleep along with the *Shema* prayer. Does this affect the prayer's significance for you?

### **10. Tales of Reincarnation: The Role of the *Rebbe***

What is a *rebbe*? Is there someone who serves that role in your life? If not, why not? Who comes closest to that role for you? If yes, describe.

What powers did the faithful believe their *rebbe* possessed to improve the lives of followers?

What quality of your character would you like to mend? How would you do so?

### **11. Mediums: Judaism's Position**

What does the Torah say about mediums?

Recount the story of King Saul and the Witch of En-Dor (1 Samuel 28:1–25). What is the significance of the story for you?

How do the Talmudic sages interpret the Torah's prohibitions against mediums?

What does the code of Jewish law (*Shulkhan Arukh*) say about consulting with the dead?

### **12. Psychic Gifts of a Medium: James Van Praagh**

Have you ever had an experience with a medium? If so, describe.

What are your concerns in dealing with a medium? What might be gained?

Do you believe that a person can commune with the dead?

### **13. Weighing the Evidence**

Traditional Jewish teaching offers the holdings of fellow jurors. What importance do you place on these texts? How do they influence your understanding of the afterlife?

Is there evidence in the book that fits a pattern that impresses you? If so, which evidence and what is its impact?

What is your verdict on survival of the soul?

What are your remaining questions or doubts about any of the topics discussed? What additional information would you seek to reach a decision?

### **14. Discrepancies in Afterlife and Reincarnation Accounts**

What are some of your questions about the nature of past-life memory?

Maimonides said that describing the afterlife to a person with a body is like describing color to a blind person. How does this analogy apply to your deliberation on the existence of the afterlife?

### **15. The Impact of Affirming the Soul's Survival**

What are your reactions to the guided visualization for Gertie as a process of closure and letting go?

How would you want to die?

How do you deal with the reality that we lack ultimate control over the bodily events that lead to our last breath?

### **16. Cultivating the Soul**

What does the word *soul* mean to you?

What do you do to cultivate your soul?

What is a soulful practice that you would like to add to your life?

### **Conclusion: Live Now Gratefully and Responsibly**

What is the present-day impact of belief in an afterlife? Reincarnation?

How does your belief or disbelief in the survival of the soul affect how you view death?

What changes would you like to make to how you live this life?

### **Appendix: Torah and Immortality of the Soul—A Hot Debate**

How do you understand the Bible's use of the term *she'ol*?

Why do you think the Bible's description of the afterlife is scant and even contradictory?

How does a post-modern reading of a text differ from modern and pre-modern readings?

What are the Jewish origins of the idea of resurrection? Reincarnation? How do you explain the history of these ideas?

What is the significance of the biblical phrase "and he was gathered to his people"? Why do you think it was only used regarding men?

With which biblical character are you most identified? What qualities of character does that person exemplify? How do you see yourself developing those qualities?