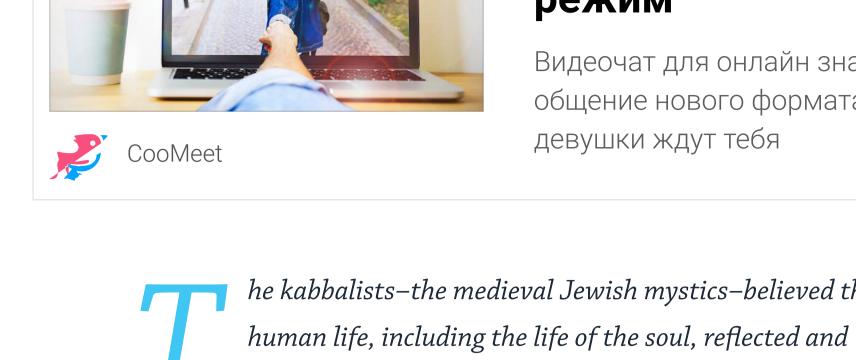


Jewish Spirituality and the Soul

The idea that the soul is the human instrument of spirituality became more prominent over the course of Jewish history. BY RACHEL ELIOR

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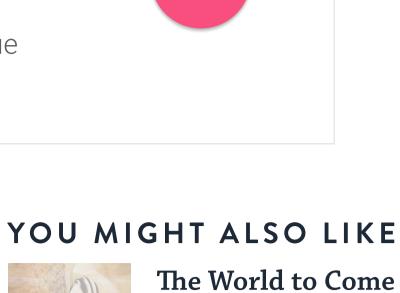
affected the divine world, the world of the sefirot: God's ten



Видеочат для онлайн знакомств общение нового формата. Красивые девушки ждут тебя

he kabbalists-the medieval Jewish mystics-believed that

Бесплатный пробный



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attributes or emanations. The following is reprinted with permission of The Gale Group from Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, edited by Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, Twayne Publishers. The Jewish doctrine of the soul, in its passage from its biblical beginnings to the later versions wrought by philosophy, the kabbalah, and (Hasidic *) thought, has undergone a far-reaching transformation.

In the Bible, body and soul are viewed as one, and existence and meaning are attributed to the soul on the physical, human, and historical plane. With the passing of time, however, the soul came to be viewed as a metaphysical entity that belonged to, affected, and was affected by the realm of the divine,

transcending the confines of history and nature.

No Existence Separate from the Body

The biblical conception, as noted, views the soul as part of the psychophysical unity of man, who, by his very nature, is composed of a body and a soul. As such, the Bible is dominated by a monistic view that ascribes no metaphysical significance to human existence, for it sees in man only his tangible body and views the soul simply as that element that imparts to the body its vitality.

The soul is, indeed, considered the site of the emotions, but not

emotional life in conflict with that of the body, it is, rather, the

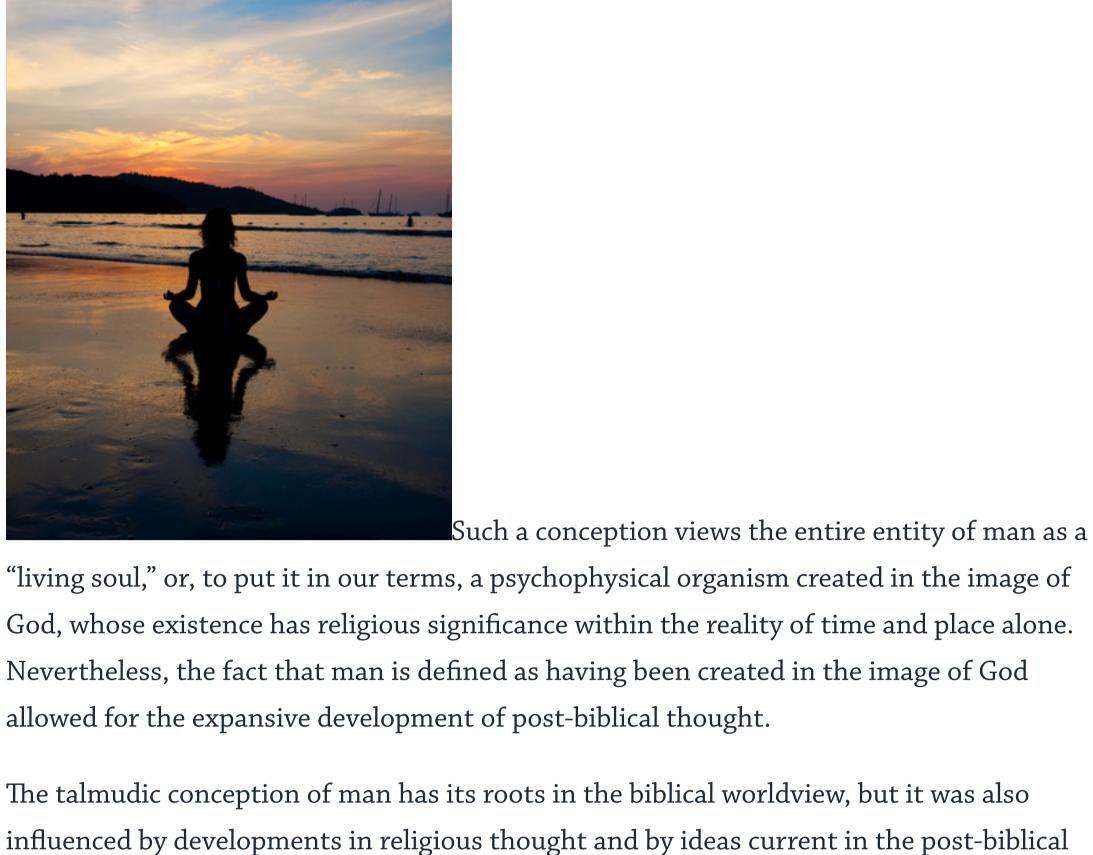
of a spiritual life separate from that of the body, or of a mental or

seat of all of man's feelings and desires, physical as well as spiritual.



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world, especially within Hellenism, which embraces the possibility of the soul's simultaneous existence on both a physical and a spiritual level. Although in rabbinic texts we find the heritage of the biblical conception regarding the psychophysical unity of the

soul, under Greek influence there begins to develop alongside it a moderately dualistic anthropology suggesting a different status for body and soul. Dualism: The Body and Soul As Separate Entities Once belief in the immortality of the soul, the revival of the dead, and the World to Come had become part of post-biblical Judaism, its religious view of man in relation to the world

underwent a change. The religious significance of the world was no longer limited by

united body and soul existing within historical time.

concrete reality or by its psychophysical expression in a human entity, which consisted of a

Alongside that reality was another, different one, which looked beyond the historical present and future. Thus, Judaism began to adopt a transcendental view of history and the meaning of human existence, and at the same time to view the soul as existing on a spiritual plane. It began, too, to speak of the soul remaining beyond the demise of the body, and of a spiritual life beginning prior to material existence. The rabbinic view of the soul as an entity having a spiritual character and as a fixed,

defined metaphysical element almost certainly developed under the influence of Orphic

and Platonic Greek thought. We may assume, too, that the Greek view of the soul as

belonging to the realm of the divine, infinite, and eternal, and the body to the realm of the material, finite, and mortal, also left its mark upon Jewish thought. Plato's idea of the preexistence and eternity of the soul, derived from his dualistic outlook, which set matter and spirit at odds with one another, was also influential. We must bear in mind, however, that for all that the dualistic anthropology expressed in the rabbinic texts had in common with the Platonic and Stoic attitudes current in the Hellenistic world, the

rabbinic sages' conception of this dualism and of the conflict between flesh and spirit was

far less radical than that of the Greeks, who viewed body and soul as an absolute

the non-divine, more vital and functional aspects of the human soul. This need to

Disembodied Spirituality The dualistic conception of man, in which body and soul are diametrically opposed, bears within it, in addition to its metaphysical significance, the first stirrings of a religious striving toward the ideal of liberating the soul from the bonds of the physical, thereby enhancing its spiritual purity. This kind of outlook was entirely foreign to biblical Judaism, but became highly developed in medieval thought and especially in the kabbalah. Having accepted the idea of the divine essence of the soul, Judaism now had to elaborate

elaborate, as well as the influence of Greek thought, led to the development of the distinctions between the soul's material and spiritual elements, between its intellectual, vital, and vegetable natures, and between the divine soul and the animal soul. These

of Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, and Aristotelianism.

Sefer ha-Bahir.

The Divine Origin of the Soul

dichotomy.

divisions gradually yielded symbols of spirit and matter, of nonbeing (ayin) and being (yesh). In later stages of development, the Jewish conception of the soul was influenced by Greek philosophical views, as these were reformulated and interpreted by the Moslem and Christian theologians of the Middle Ages. For the first time, Judaism viewed the doctrine

unique attempt to adapt these philosophical views to the (Torah *) and to make them a means for interpreting concepts relating to ethics, religious piety, prophecy, and the knowledge of God. The Soul as the Instrument of Perfection Medieval Jewish thought focused its attention on the one hand on the immortality of the soul and the relationship between body and soul, or between matter and spirit, and on the

other on the hierarchy of the upper worlds and the theory of knowledge. The answers that

were proposed for these problems were clearly influenced by the medieval interpretations

In consonance with these influences, the medieval Jewish doctrine of the soul was often

of the soul as belonging to the realm of philosophy, and medieval Jewish thought made a

associated with the idea of perfection. Personal perfection could be achieved by means of the soul's communion with or, as the Hebrew had it, cleaving to (devekut) the spiritual element surrounding it, that is, the "universal soul," the "active intelligence," or God himself. Looked at from a different perspective, the emphasis on communion meant that man's relationship to God was established through intellectual effort, philosophical contemplation, or mystical devotion. The Jewish doctrine of the soul, however, did not remain within the confines of the Greek schools of thought and their view of the soul as being essentially a philosophical problem.

The philosophical concepts it had acquired regarding the spiritual hierarchy of the universe

and questions bound up with the conception of the soul underwent a mythical-Gnostic

In the Sefer ha-Bahir, the creation and the molding and sustenance of souls is bound up

transformation in the twelfth century, when they encountered the early kabbalah and the

with an erotic myth that speaks of sexual union between cosmic entities in the world of the sefirot (divine emanations) and of the process of creation in general. The text alludes, in highly symbolic language, to a system that was further developed in the Zohar and other kabbalistic literature. Three stages of development are discerned in the formation of souls: the ideal, the ontological, and the actual. These stages parallel both the processes of intercourse, pregnancy, and birth, by which the physical body comes into being, and the relationships

The erotic symbolism by which the dynamic relationship between the various aspects of

the divine is described in the kabbalistic system relates to the idea that the creation of

souls takes place in connection with an act of cosmic union. In addition, it reflects deep

religious implications regarding the exalted nature of the soul that were attached to

human sexual union on account of its archetypal parallel in the supernal worlds.

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The kabbalistic doctrine of the soul is based upon three fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of man: (1) the divine origin of the human soul; (2) the idea that man is structured in the image of the sefirot, and that his soul reflects the hierarchy of the supernatural worlds, and (3) the idea that man can influence the world of the divine. The kabbalah borrowed the philosophical division of the soul into parts and superimposed a mystical quality upon it, holding that each part was expressive of different sefirot.

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between the sefirot in the supernal [i.e. divine] world.

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Jewish mysticism has taken many

forms.

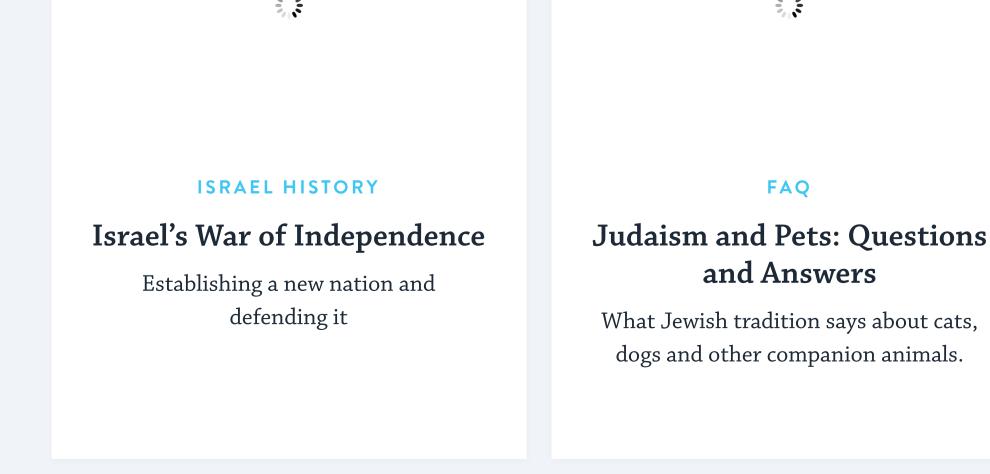
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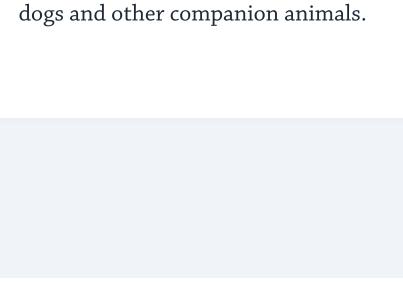
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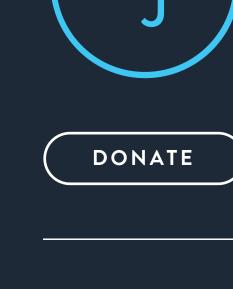
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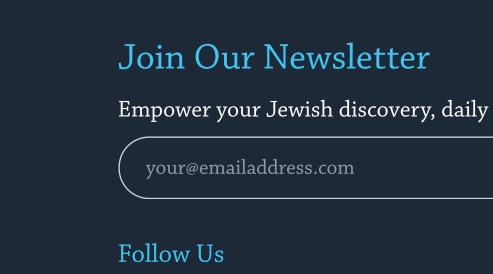
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