Soul of Fire: A Theory of Biblical Man

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Though it is acknowledged as a primary source of Western ideas on social morals and monotheism, when it comes to the afterlife, the Hebrew Bible is deemed mute. This dismissal stems from a striking fact: Nowhere in the Bible are souls witnessed in any post-life habitat. Like many ancient mythologies, the New Testament takes us frequently into a soul-world in the footsteps of Jesus,[1] and the Koran, too, peeks into the garden of eternal reward.[2] Biblical figures, however, are never seen in the world of the dead. We never view their souls in heaven or in hell.[3] Even when a heavenly assembly is portrayed, as in the opening of Job, or in the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah, human souls are invariably absent. Likewise, when people die, the narrative does not follow them into the beyond. Just think of Elijah ascending from this earthly existence, leaving the reader at the threshold of heaven, "and he saw him no more."[4] From the fact that we do not see souls in the Hebrew Bible many have deduced that it fails to articulate a soul-afterlife at all.

The text, however, does not lend itself to an interpretation that fully negates an afterlife either. While souls are not *seen* there, references are made to its existence. In particular, a netherworld called Sheol is mentioned repeatedly; we know of its dwellers, *refaim*, and biblical figures convey a fear of

going there.[5] The Bible also upholds the idea of postmortem judgment, suggesting the possibility of further reward. Additional hints include Samuel speaking to Saul from the grave,[6] Elijah and Hanoch being taken to God,[7] and a letter arriving from Elijah after his demise.[8] Most famously, Daniel tells of the virtuous rising to their destiny in the End of Days.[9]

Due to its importance, we would expect that if, in fact, the Bible intended to advance the doctrine of an afterlife, the least it could do is picture the glory of life eternal. But this is not the case. While the epic of Gilgamesh, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Canaanite lore, and Greek mythology all include stories of people visiting the world of the dead and returning to report of souls they have seen, the Hebrew canon has none.

On the basis of these considerations, scholars concluded that the Hebrew Bible maintained a primitive or immature idea of the soul, which in turn prevented the text's development of a clear notion of an afterlife. They assumed that the Hebrew Bible must have conceived of man as a being that is cohesive only in connection to the physical body. Something of man may continue to exist after death, but without its body it loses its meaning. In this view, the treatments of the soul in Greek philosophy and the New Testament are dramatically progressive improvements on the Hebrew Bible, which, it is said, cobbled together primitive soul concepts familiar from Vedic India[10] to pagan Rome.[11]

This view has become academic commonplace. As the scholar H.W. Robinson writes:

> [In the Old Testament] there is no contrast between the body and the soul, such as the terms instinctively suggest to us. The shades of the dead in Sheol… are not called "souls"… nor does the Old Testament contain any distinct word for "body," as it surely would have done, had this idea been sharply differentiated from that of "soul." Man's nature is a product of the two factors—the breath-soul [*nefesh*] which is his principle of life, and a complex of physical organs which this animates. Separate them, and the man ceases to be, in any real sense of personality.[12]

Another scholar, Lynn de Silva, puts it this way:

> The notion of the soul as an immortal entity which enters the body at birth and leaves it at death is quite foreign to the biblical view of man.[13]

This approach pervades theological discourse as well. Here, for instance, is the official position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

> In the Old Testament, soul is essentially the life principle. It always appears in some form or manifestation without which it could not exist. Hebrews could not conceive of a disembodied soul.[14]

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* follows suit, including the Bible under the following pejorative rubric:

> The more primitive of these interpretations [of the soul] has been based on an integralistic evaluation of the human nature. Thus the individual person has been conceived as a psychophysical organism, of which both the material and the non-material constituents are essential in order to maintain a properly integrated personal existence. From such an evaluation it has followed that death is the fatal shattering of personal existence. Although some constituent element of the living person has been deemed to survive this disintegration, it has not been regarded as conserving the essential self or personality.[15]

Such a "primitive" idea of man can hardly serve as inspiration.

Aside from the issue of the afterlife, there is a strong linguistic component in the way many scholars dismiss the Hebrew Bible's idea of man. As a general rule they were completely baffled by the Bible's terminology regarding the essence of man, and the human metaphysical makeup. They despaired of finding a consistent use of the Bible's terminology. This linguistic despair is connected to a general prejudice against the Hebrew Bible's philosophical rigor, but also stands on its own as one of the main reasons for misunderstanding the Bible's metaphysical teachings, and for dismissing it so summarily.

What is the semantic issue at hand? Contrary to the Christological tradition (dominating biblical lexicography through the nineteenh century and beyond), the Hebrew canon does not uphold the dualist body-soul doctrine, submitting instead three soul terms: *Nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshama*. In general, Western thinkers struggled to fit the three Hebrew souls into the later single-soul dogma. In the Gospels, the human core is called *psuche* ("soul") while *pneuma* ("spirit") is primarily reserved for God's emanation (as in "the Holy Spirit").[16] The Greek translations and their English offshoots attempted to equate *nefesh* with "soul" and *ruah* with "spirit." *Neshama*, having no Greek counterpart, was translated as "breath."

But even a superficial reading of the Bible inevitably reveals that these easy correlations falter, and the inevitable result was a diffusion of the Hebrew terms. In the King James Version (KJV), for example, *ruah* is variously translated as "wind," "spirit," and "breath," but also occasionally as "mind," "anger," "courage," etc. *Nefesh*, though predominantly rendered as "soul," is also translated as "breath," "self," "mind," "heart," "will," "desire," and "appetite." Even the infrequent *neshama* is variously rendered as "breath," "spirit," and "soul." From the opposite perspective, when encountering the word "soul" in the KJV, the reader has no way of knowing if it refers to *nefesh*, *neshama*, or *nidvati*; "spirit" can be a translation of *ruah*, *neshama*, or *ov*; and behind "breath" can lie any one of the three soul terms. In this *mélange*, the original, precise biblical meanings are all but lost.

In what follows, I intend to show that the original Hebrew terminology was both distinct and consistent, and that the very absence of visible souls in the Hebrew Bible points to a more commanding alternative conception of man's inner being. I also intend to show that while the Bible does not uphold the soul-body dichotomy—which most critics have considered prerequisite to a belief in the persistence of the soul after death—it does demonstrate the presence of a four-element structure of both matter and spirit that supports a belief in life eternal. This structure has been either overlooked or confused with Aristotle's schema to the point that the spiritual implications of the biblical usage have gone undiscovered.

Thus, scholars searching the Hebrew Bible for signs of an interest in the afterlife have been looking through the wrong intellectual lenses, and have therefore missed the Hebrew Bible's profound teaching concerning man's constitution and destiny. To gain access to this metaphysical worldview of the ancient Israelite Sages we must stop looking for a landscape of Heaven under the light of our preconceived expectations. In ancient Israelite philosophy, the netherworld is to be understood, not imagined; the divine soul is to be realized, not seen.

II

The first step in parsing the Hebrew Bible's idea of man is to clarify the text's view of the cosmos. Any notion of souls "in Heaven" already invokes this link. In antiquity, the picture of the cosmos defined the framework of reality. It stretched from the realm of the gods to that of the demons, and its governing order commanded all natural law in the phenomenological world. For the Hebrew Bible, the cosmic picture is defined by a four-element hierarchical construct. Surprising to those familiar with the model solely from Greek thought, a version of the ancient theory of the four elements—Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire—debuted in the ancient Israelite kingdom before Aristotle or, probably, Empedocles.[17] Most easily, the four primal elements can be discerned in successive verses in the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes (this reference will soon help illuminate earlier biblical sources):

> 4. A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth forever stands. [Earth]
> 5. The sun rises and the sun comes, and hastens to the place where it rises. [Fire]

> 6. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. [Wind]
> 7. All streams run to the sea, but the sea does not fill; to the place where the streams run to, there they run again. [Water][18]

Critically, the sun here not only embodies fire and light, which until as late as the eighteenth century were considered one and the same. The sun also conjures up the concept of heaven, as it was modeled in Genesis: "Let there be lights [Fire] in the firmament of the heaven."[19] Indeed, the heavens, or *shamayim*, may correspond to the very word for sun, *shemesh*.[20] Today we know that outer space is dark and frigid. But in biblical times, the heavens were considered solid, translucent, and fully radiant—a dome of solidified energy—home of the sun and the star-lights, and the source of lightning.[21] In the biblical worldview, without a heaven above, the earth would be cold and dark.

Transcending its energetic attributes, the biblical vision of heaven also equates it with a metaphysical realm of Fire—as the high kingdom of *serafim*.[22] Thus, in his grand description of God's heavenly chariots, Ezekiel reports:

> The likeness of the living creatures, their appearance like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of torches… and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning….[23]

Likewise, when ascending to this realm, Elijah's horse and carriage were made of fire, and God's fire repeatedly falls from heaven to devour sacrificial offerings, and the wicked. In one story, an angel of God transports himself to heaven through a rising flame, in front of Samson's parents' eyes. Many other examples—in the Bible as well as the Apocrypha—feature the fire-nature of heaven's canopy and the heavenly kingdom. When our forefathers looked up into the sky, this is what they envisioned. Day or night, the sky-dome was ablaze.

Once we understand that the heavens, *shamayim*, are a literal embodiment of fire, the four elements emerge in many additional verses. Discussing man's inferiority to God, for instance, Proverbs asks rhetorically:

Who has ascended into *Heaven* [Fire] and descended?
Who gathered the *Wind* in his fists?
Who bound the *Water* in a garment?
Who established all the ends of the *earth*? [24]

Likewise, in Psalm 18:

8. Then the *earth* shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because he was angry. [Earth]
9-10. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring *fire* from his mouth; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens coming down, *arafel* under his feet. [Fire/Heaven]
11. And he rode upon a cherub, and flew; he flew upon the wings of the *wind*. [Wind]
12. He made darkness his secret place; his dwelling the dark *water*, and rain-clouds of the skies. [Water][25]

These and other references show how early the four-element scheme was manifest in ancient Israelite writings.[26] Indeed, the very first two verses of the Bible invoke these same elements:

In the beginning God created the *heaven* [fire] and the *earth*…. And the *wind* of God hovered upon the face of the *water*.[27]

This primordial blueprint can be discerned in the subsequent unfolding of creation, for the first six days comprise two sets of three, each opening with a distinct element. Days one and four both start with light, or fire. Days two and five are initiated by water. And days three and six both stem from the earth element. Thus, "in six days the Lord made *heaven* [fire] and *earth*, the *sea*, and all that is in them."[28] Later we will learn why the Wind element may only reappear in the story of Adam and Eve.

From Genesis we also learn the biblical hierarchy, placing Water bottommost. This cosmic order is reiterated in the Ten Commandments, where it states: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of

anything that is in the heaven above [fire], or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water underneath the earth."[29]

Here, then, are the biblical spheres of the cosmos: Fire, as heaven, is on top; then a circling wind; below it the green earth; and underneath the primal waters of the abyss, called *tehom*.[30]

III

This view of the cosmos is essential to discovering the Hebrew Bible's consistent concepts of the soul. The key is to realize that all biblical souls were not created equal. Rather, each Hebrew soul-term corresponds to one of the cosmic dominions, from which it was created and to which it gravitates at the moment of passing. Man's link to the elements is as follows:

Body—Earth
Nefesh—Water
Ruah—Wind
Neshama—Fire

Not to be mistaken for material building blocks, as in the Aristotelian model,[31] in the Bible each element represents a realm of being. Man, and only man, exists simultaneously in all four realms. For man, therefore, each *elemental soul* represents a different way of existing as an "I." In understanding the three soul-terms distinctively, it becomes apparent that instead of an "immature" text, the Hebrew Bible proves to be philosophically acute, comprehensive, and revolutionary.

Let us take each element in turn. First, the material element, Earth. In the biblical worldview Earth represents man's physical body, the base component of our existence (preceding the three soul-terms). On one level,

the connection between Earth and body is straightforward. The "clay" body is formed "from the dust of the ground," and upon death it returns to the ground, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return."[32] The Bible combines two terms to define the body: *basar*, generally translated as "flesh," and *etzem*, the bone frame.[33] Together they compose a twofold perception of the physique, characterized by the enduring skeleton and the soft-tissue husk that encases it.[34] Even independently *basar* and *etzem* are explicitly of Earth: Job teaches that "All flesh (*basar*) shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto *'afar* [Earth]."[35] And the Psalmist says, "My figure (*atzmi*) was not hidden from you, as I was formed in secret, constructed in the bottoms of the Earth."[36] The great medieval linguist Abraham Ibn Ezra stresses that "bones, as the body's foundation, are of the Earth and stand for Earth."[37] Formed from the ground, *etzem* and *basar* are a compound manifestation of this element.

But on a deeper level we must note that the "dust" (an inadequate rendition of the Hebrew *'afar*) that we are created of is anything but listless. Rather, it represents dark soil taken from a verdant Earth. Indeed, the very root of *'afar* likely relates to fruit and reproduction.[38] At the very least, many verses show it to be moist and fertile, "and from another *'afar* they will *grow*."[39] The word *etzem*—for bones—likewise connects to the idea of Earth as the source of organic growth, since *etzem* is related to *etz*, Hebrew for "tree."[40] Inside each of us the Bible sees a growing tree—trunk and limbs—which gives form to our body.

Pointedly, plants, and not minerals, are the children of the biblical "Earth." Here we discern a fundamental connection between the body and the sphere of earthen existence, as an autonomous layer of the cosmos. Earthen dominion is outlined by the third day of creation—before the introduction of animals—"Let the Earth sprout grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the Earth."[41] By definition, then, Earth is the sphere of *growth* and *procreation*. Our bodies make us, too, children of Earth. It is the body that grows, that produces sperm, or ova, and thereby procreates. Being formed of soil

does not debase us, therefore, but rather connects us to the entire botanic reality. Indeed, continuity of species (through "seeds," an exclusive third-day theme) defines the very concept of *organisms*. Ultimately, then, the Earth element captures not inorganic matter, but the organic criterion—or what Aristotle would call our vegetative soul.[42]

This explains the body-plant analogy employed throughout the Hebrew Bible. Particularly, the same word, *zera*, denotes both the seed of plants and the seed of man. Likewise, the word for fruit, *pri*, also describes children—"fruit of the loin"—and at least a half-dozen other terms employ this parallel usage.[43] Indeed, plant imagery is frequently employed to describe human physical existence, and continuity. Isaiah: "There shall come forth a shoot from the trunk of Yishai."[44] Elsewhere in Isaiah: "Your bones shall *flower* like grass."[45] Ezekiel: "I made you thrive like a plant in the field."[46] Psalms: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree."[47] More than merely poetic metaphors, these analogies point toward the core of the biblical worldview.

The body, therefore, is far more than a clay vessel. Man, in some sense, is first of all a plant. Itself growing, then wilting with age and eventually returning to the earth (only to fertilize new growth), the material body marks our being as an organism. On this level of existence, each and every one of us is a seed of Earth, like the flowers and the trees. And the elemental Earth principle, as a sphere of generation and degeneration, explains the puzzling link within the first verse of Ecclesiastes with which we opened: "A generation goes, and a generation comes," *because* "the Earth stands forever."[48] Our growing body, created of Earth, is our share in this basic, organic cycle of reality.

IV

The second level of our being is that of *nefesh*, the part of us related to water. Water itself, of course, stands for life. This is why, in the Bible, flowing waters are considered "alive"—*mayim hayim*,[49] and why Ecclesiastes chose running streams to signify the element. That *nefesh*, too, stands for life (or the flowing "life force") is evident in over sixty biblical references.[50] In ancient Israelite thought, "life" means *animation*, the capacity for independent movement, and is therefore a term reserved for animals. Contrary both to Western languages and to the customary scientific usage, the Bible never applies to plants the Hebrew term for life, *hai*; likewise, there is no such thing as a "dead" plant.

Nefesh, then, is not a uniquely human soul, as some translations imply, but one that humans share with animals from insects to primates. Fitting its appropriate Latin translation, *anima*, the term captures the layer of creation as defined on its fifth day: "God said, Let the Water bring forth abundantly—*nefesh* creatures that have life, and God created every crawling *nefesh* that has life."[51] That all animals are possessed of a *nefesh* too we also learn from Leviticus: "He that kills a human *nefesh* shall surely be put to death. And he that kills a beast *nefesh* shall repay it."[52] The Bible tells us the relation of *nefesh* not only to animal life, but also to life's opposite. *Nefesh* is the only term used in reference to death. While the body may wither, it is the *nefesh* itself that dies, as Samson declares, "Let my *nefesh* die with the Philistines."[53] When the body stills, life runs out.

How do we know that *nefesh* is related to water? First, as mentioned, both connote life. In addition, unlike the other two biblical soul-terms, *nefesh* is always described as liquid: "He poured out his *nefesh* to death";[54] "My *nefesh* leaks away for sorrow";[55] "our *nefesh* dried away";[56] "I poured out my *nefesh* before the Lord," and more.[57] The prophet Samuel brings the

point home: "For we all must die," he teaches, "[indeed] as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again—God does not spare any *nefesh*."[58]

The most important connection between *nefesh* and the ever-flowing element of water, however, is its association with blood. Alluding to the pumping, animated *bloodflow* that runs in our veins (and not to chemical attributes), Leviticus teaches: "For the *nefesh* of the body is in the blood." Deuteronomy reiterates the same idea, "For the blood *is* the *nefesh*... pour it on the earth *like water*," and Ezekiel famously exclaims "In your blood, live!"[59]

On the other hand, the alleged connection between *nefesh* and breath has no basis at all in biblical texts, and stems solely from superimposing Hindu,[60] and perhaps ancient Greek,[61] ideas of breath as the all-encompassing-force-of-life upon the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, the connection between *nefesh* and water explains the Bible's underworld, Sheol. Few people realize that the biblical Sheol is devoid of fire and brimstone. It is not scorching, but cold, and its dwellers do not agonize but float in sleep.[62] At the bottom of the Bible's cosmic order, Sheol is in fact a dark water-world, submerged in the abyss called *tehom*, where "the *refaim* swirl under the waters."[63] When plunged into the sea, Jonah could therefore say: "out of the belly of Sheol I cried… For you cast me into the *tehom*."[64] And the same parallel is explicit in Ezekiel: "On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the *tehom* over it, and held back its rivers, and its many waters were stopped up."[65] Likewise, "the waves of death encompassed me, the rivers of perdition assailed me; the pangs of Sheol encompassed me."[66] Hence the dead descend to the underworld through water-wells, called *bor,* that reach below the entire plate of the Earth: "You shall be brought down to Sheol, to the farther reaches of the *bor*."[67]

Remarkably, the biblical netherworld has nothing to do with punishment; each of us, not only sinners, reaches Sheol. Ecclesiastes urges every reader to embrace life, because "there is no work or device or knowledge or

wisdom in Sheol where you are headed."[68] Likewise, Jacob lamented the presumed loss of Joseph's life by saying, "I will go down into Sheol, unto my son."[69] Though both were righteous, they were destined for the underworld—the primal, collective reservoir of life.

As Ecclesiastes underscores, it is the nature of water to flow, but just as importantly it is the nature of water to flow downward. Thus our own blood flow, our innate water-element, runs down to an underworld after death: "Let the wicked dry out; let them bleed to Sheol."[70] Sheol makes sixty-five appearances in the Bible, a third of which make an explicit link to *nefesh* and blood. No other soul-term is ever used in this context. When the Bible talks of the Earth covering the blood of the dead it is referring not to a heap of soil, but to the entire Earth realm. So just as our material body returns to the Earth, dust to dust, our *nefesh* life force returns to the *tehom*, blood to blood.[71]

In summary, the animation of *nefesh* defines a separate level or reality, above and beyond the growth of earthbound flora.[72] Together with the ability to carry ourselves from place to place, it represents sensation, cognitive processes, and instinctive drives. For the Bible, rivers are the veins and arteries of the earth, just as our own blood flows in the veins and arteries of our bodies. As Water is the natural force of animation that impels all life, so our *nefesh*, tied to water, is our personal share in animation and life.

V

The third level of what makes us human is *ruah*—literally Wind, which emanates from an intermediary realm between Heaven and Earth. Like *nefesh*, *ruah* is not unique to humans. In Psalm 104, the statement "You take away their *ruah*, they die" refers to "living things both small and great."[73] Ecclesiastes declares: "They have all one *ruah*; so that man has no

pre-eminence above the beast."[74] In the story of the flood, the animals enter the ark "two by two, of all flesh in which is a *ruah*."[75] *Ruah* is, however, restricted to animals that breathe with lungs—the only ones endangered by the flood.[76] Fish and bugs have no share in *ruah*, but in varying degrees reptiles, birds, and mammals do. If our bones make us relatives to every growing tree, and our *nefesh* makes us relatives to all animated life forms, *ruah* makes us closer relatives to higher animals, from iguanas (however borderline), to dolphins, to chimpanzees.

What separates breathing and non-breathing animals on such a fundamental level? The answer lies in the notion of "social self." *Ruah*, translated as spirit, is a subject not for divinity school, but for a department of social sciences, for *ruah* accounts for all social relationships and inter-subjective dealings. Lower animals may live in societies, but lacking hierarchy they fail to acquire individual, social identities. Bees, for instance, assume their roles solely according to their age, while dogs gain their position in the pack through merit. As a rule of thumb, lower animals, even fish, cannot recognize individual counterparts, while reptiles,[77] birds, and mammals can.[78] That the Bible appreciates inter-subjective relations in higher animals—particularly mother-child empathy—is evident from different decrees, including: "You shall not kill it and its young both in one day,"[79] and "If a bird's nest happens to be before you… you shall not take the mother with the young."[80] No comparable sensitivity pertains to fish.

It is no coincidence, then, that *ruah* makes its real debut in the Garden of Eden, where God appears "amidst the *ruah* of day."[81] Only here, as God declared, "it is not good that man shall be alone,"[82] did Adam and Eve form the first social unit. And feeling themselves nude, they clothed themselves—the archetypical social convention. Similar examples regarding the social nature of *ruah* abound elsewhere: of marital bonds, "And the *ruah* of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife";[83] of the breaking thereof, "the Lord has called you a forsaken woman, grieved in *ruah*, as a wife of youth when rejected";[84] of in-law tensions, in the case of Esau's wives, "which were a grief of *ruah* unto Isaac and to Rebecca";[85] of

political alliance, "Then God sent a negative *ruah* between Abimelech and the men of Shechem";[86] and finally, since nothing is more social by nature than *treachery*, the general rule: "Take heed to your *ruah*, that you do not betray."[87] With *ruah*, then, society was born, granting each individual a social persona, on top of his or her organic and animal selves.

Together with social character, *ruah* is also responsible for dreams, partiality (likes and dislikes), play, and conscience. At its best, *ruah* strives for social greatness: power, leadership, and social justice. In Israelite thought, however, even the highest level of *ruah*, prophecy, serves a strictly social end. Isaiah makes the connection clear regarding the coming of the Messiah:

> And the *ruah* of the Lord shall rest upon him, the *ruah* of wisdom and understanding, the *ruah* of counsel and might, the *ruah* of knowledge and the Fear of the Lord. And shall make him smell (*va'hariho*)[88] with [employing] Fear of the Lord: And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor… and with the *ruah* of his lips he shall slay the wicked.[89]

Having an individual social persona also permits self-awareness, itself a determining function of *ruah*, exemplified by Adam and Eve first *blushing* after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. As anyone who has practiced meditation knows, awareness and consciousness are connected to breath. Unlike metabolic (earth) and circulatory (water) systems, we can consciously control respiration.

The easiest way to appreciate the apparatus of *ruah* is, appropriately, through its effect on the collective. Thus it can be felt sweeping over a sport stadium, soaring in music, or infecting a mob. In these situations, the power of *ruah* may run both ways—from a *ruah*-infused leader to the masses, or vice versa, from the accumulative spirit of the group to the leader. At the same time, in the Bible *ruah* never really becomes part of man; it is always called "the *ruah* of the Lord." Here, for instance, is the description of Samson's courage: "And the *ruah* of the Lord came mightily upon him and he

tore the lion apart."[90] This added "spirit" was a momentary gift, a burst of bravery, a feeling that he could achieve anything.

In other instances, "spirit" proves to be a transferable, quantifiable commodity, as in the case of Moses: "The Lord… took of the *ruah* that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders,"[91] or in the case of Elisha pleading of Elijah "Let a double portion of your *ruah* be upon me."[92] These examples indicate a wider conception of one's *ruah* as passing on, in part, to people one has closely interacted with. A father and mother, in particular, give children not only of their body's genes (as biological parents), but also of their spirit (as relational parents). This in turn explains the circling nature of the biblical Wind.

Similarly, we find in the story of Saul that an addition of *ruah* transforms one's persona (when changed into charismatic king-material), "the *ruah* of the Lord will come upon you… and you shall be turned into another man,"[93] as does its subsequent removal: "But the *ruah* of the Lord departed from Saul."[94] In ancient Israelite thought an individual is possessed by *ruah*, not vice versa. Like a social mantle, we assume the air of our *ruah* during life—rich or poor, husband or wife, meek or brave—but it does not incarnate our inner self.

VI

The final biblical soul-term is *neshama*—the uniquely human soul. The 25 appearances of *neshama* in the Bible refer only to people, and the semantic opposite of *neshama—shmama*—denotes the absence of people.[95] Why is *neshama* uniquely human? Because it is our share in Heaven.

Contrary to a common misconception, *neshama* has no connection to "breath," and indeed, the Bible contains not a single occurrence

of the root *nasham* in connection to breath. It refers, rather, to a soul of fire, as Proverbs declares, "Man's *neshama* is a candle-flame of the Lord."[96] The same fire is found in Isaiah: "For the *inferno* was ordained of old…. The *neshama* of the Lord, like a river of brimstone, *burns* inside it."[97] Ibn Ezra ridicules those who suggest that the biblical root means "to breathe" and maintains instead that *neshama* comes from the word *shamayim* (heaven), which we already established as a fire realm.[98] Ibn Ezra is in line with the earlier Midrash that explains a double letter in Genesis 2:7, "And the Lord God formed (*vayyitzer*) man." The Midrash, asks: "Why two *yud*s? For there were two creations in one; man was made half of the earth, and half of the heavens."[99]

In addition to the cosmic fire of *neshama*'s heavenly origin, "light" is used innumerable times to signify wisdom and truth—as functions of our innate divine capacity.[100] Indeed, in ancient Israelite metaphysics, the fire of supreme divination and the light of Godly knowledge both infuse the fire-nature of heaven. This is, on the deepest level, the "fire" of God's word: out of the midst of fire God speaks to Moses in the bush, and out of the midst of fire God delivers his commandments at Sinai. According to the Talmud: "The testament God gave Moses is rooted in white fire, engraved from black fire; it is fire, mingled with fire, hewn with fire, given with fire; as it says, 'From his right—a *fire-law* to his people.'"[101] Likewise, "Behold, I will turn my words in your mouth into fire."[102] God's everlasting "word," from which he created the world, is thus embossed in the brilliant fire-realm—a world untouched by time—as the Psalmist reports: "The heavens tell the magnitude of God... and their words reach to the end of the world,"[103] and elsewhere, "For ever, O Lord, your word is fixed in Heaven";[104] fire fixed in fire.

The human *neshama* is a spark of this fiery heaven embedded in man, and the nature of this component is our own ability to create with words, as the sole possessors of language in the animal kingdom. Indeed, when Onkelus rendered the verse describing the creation of man into Aramaic, he translated *nishmat hayim* as "a speaking-soul"; not prone to embellishing, he meant this as a literal translation. The common reading of this verse—"God

breathed into man's nostrils a breath of life"—is misleading, since neither breath nor nostrils are involved. Rather, God *kindled* in man a living, speaking soul.[105]

Fittingly, *neshama* often appears in the context of speech. In the book of Job: "To whom have you *articulated words*; and whose speaking-soul (*neshama*) came from you?";[106] "All the while my speaking-soul (*neshama*) is in me…. My lips shall not *speak* wickedness";[107] "The speaking-soul (*neshama*) of the Almighty gives them *understanding*."[108] In Daniel: "How can my lord's servant *talk* with my lord? As for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, nor a speaking-soul (*neshama*) left in me anymore."[109] Other verses use the term for God's power to create with words[110] as well as his rebuke,[111] while the last verse of Psalms calls for all *neshama* to *chant* God's praise.[112] With this understanding, we may appreciate Saadia Gaon's description of man's eternal essence:

> As for the quality of its substance, it is comparable in purity to that of the heavenly spheres. Like the latter, it attains luminosity as a result of the light, which it receives from God, except that its substance becomes, in consequence thereof, even finer than that of the spheres. That is how it came to be endowed with the power of speech.[113]

At the deepest level, the core of the word *neshama* is, I suggest, the root word *shem* (name), signifying the ability to name (i.e. to categorize) that defines man's capacity for abstract thought, and Adam's first act after he was ensouled. In fact, in Arabic, s-m-w serves as the root of the word "heaven" (*samaa*) and also means "to name."[114] The heavenly speaking-soul is therefore the source of our creative ability, moral responsibility, and control over the world. If *ruah* captures the "self" that we are allotted by God, then *neshama* is the identity that we give to ourselves, by utilizing our capacity for thought. As we go through our ephemeral life, this *neshama* becomes enlightened by our learning of God. It is the nature of fire to illuminate, but just as importantly it is the cosmic nature of fire to rise. Therefore, when we die, our own *neshama*—the soul of fire—rises up to heaven.

VII

Ultimately man is the crown of creation because only man incorporates each of the four elements in his being. In the Bible, therefore, every human being mirrors God's cosmos at large. Being a microcosm, "the destruction of any person's life is tantamount to destroying a whole world and the preservation of a single life is tantamount to preserving a whole world."[115] To come full circle, linking the cosmic dominions and the constitution of man, I will conclude my analysis of the four-element construct with another passage of Ecclesiastes, from the section in which Kohelet concluded *his* essay. There he forges a direct parallel to the four cosmic elements with which he opened his book, though now focusing on the four corresponding components of man. At the moment of his death, says Kohelet, "Man goes to his eternal home."[116] Kohelet describes this passing as follows:

> The silver cord snaps, and the gold-globe is released.
> And the pitcher breaks at the fountain, and the wheel is released
> from the *bor*;
> And the dust [*'afar*] returns to the earth as it was,
> And the wind returns to God who had granted it.[117]

The flesh, the body, is of Earth, to which it returns in burial. The *nefesh*, being of Water, is released when the water-pitcher, its earthen vessel, is broken, running down the *bor* to the watery abyss of the underworld. The Wind-spirit is *ruah*. It has always been of God, and it returns to the collective awareness within God's treasury. Finally, the *neshama* of Fire, here called "*gulat hazahav*" (the "gold-globe"). In antiquity gold stood for fire, its shine signifying the sun.[118] Kohelet thus mirrors the sun-globe from his first chapter, and anticipates the prophet Zechariah's metaphor, where the same term represented God's highest divine flames that watch over the world with

seven eyes. This *neshama* becomes free of its worldly link, as the silver cord snaps, letting our fiery core rise up to the eternal, divine light.

This is the true, transcendent view of the afterlife in heaven in the Hebrew Bible—an existence within the light of pure, radiant truth, *olam ha'emet*. As Isaiah says, "the Lord will be unto you an everlasting light."[119] And as Malachi reiterates, "A benedictive sun shall rise for you who fear my name."[120] And as Daniel teaches in the only biblical verse about the world to come: "And those who are wise shall shine like the radiance of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."[121] What are stars if not distant suns; golden globes of fire.

What does it mean to become a star? Ultimately, *neshama* designates man's personal potential, his language faculty. Its root word, however, the concept of a name (*shem*), expresses the realization of potential, and the accomplishment achieved through that capacity. In other words, the *neshama* is the means by which we create our own name.[122] This name—the distilled, essential idea of who we are—designates an eternal reality within the fire sphere of heaven.

How can we be sure that, for the Bible, stars are a manifestation of names? Just two verses prior to talking of the eternal stars, Daniel says: "At that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book."[123] Furthermore, this is the lesson of Psalms: "He counts the number of the stars. He calls them all by their names."[124] God needs no book in order to remember. Rather, the fiery book of heaven stands for an ideal state of existence. Indeed, this is the same book that, according to Israelite tradition, served as the blueprint for creation. The "revised" book, therefore, where the righteous are themselves inscribed in white fire, engraved from black fire, will serve as the basis for what Isaiah calls "the new heavens and the new earth" in days to come.[125] This is the apparatus of reincarnation, *tehiyat hametim*, for, indeed, man will not stand again, "not until the heavens stir and waken from their sleep."[126]

Far from the superficial meanings of "reputation," or "prominence," the *name* a person achieves is not of this world, nor limited to it. All of the

following verses, and many others, misread as shallow allegories, conveyed, all along, the Hebrew Bible's afterlife for the *neshama.* Of the righteous it is written: "Unto them will I give in my house and within my walls a hold and a *name* better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them *an everlasting name*, which shall not be cut off."[127] Of the evil, the reverse: "The memory of the just is blessed: but the *name* of the wicked shall perish";[128] "you shall destroy *their name* from under heaven."[129]

The most telling example, however, is that of Moses, of whom the Bible says, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord had known face to face."[130] On the one hand, we find that the manifestation of this unsurpassed spiritual status is defined as God's knowing his *name*, "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken: for you have found grace in my sight, *and I know you by name.*"[131] More pointedly, though, when Moses argues for the salvation of his people he offers his eternal *name* as a bargaining chip, "But now, if you will forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of your book which you have written."[132] This is the same "book" that Daniel invokes.

Finally, our "name" is to Heaven as our "seed" is to Earth. This is proven from the closing verses of Isaiah: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain."[133] One's name is precisely what will be remembered forever—by God and through God—enlightened with one's acquired share of divine wisdom.[134]

VIII

At first glance, one may question the value of connecting the idea of man to an archaic picture of the cosmos. We have come to know the heavens as an expanding emptiness, rather than a translucent fire-dome. The idea of *neshama* as a heavenly "light," therefore, loses for us its concreteness. This was not the case in antiquity. No doubt, Israelite Sages held the hierarchical picture as more "scientific" than metaphoric. The elements of man were—to them—tangible insertions from the multiple rings of reality. Just as the body was shaped from soil, the *neshama* was fashioned of stardust, taken from the hosts of angelic chariots.

Nonetheless, the Bible transcends the limits of antiquated perceptions. It teaches how to distinguish within each one of us the material, the dynamic, the relational, and the ideal, and these distinctions add up to a worldview with far-reaching philosophical consequence.[135] In so doing, it allows the ideal "I" to shed not only the physical body and mortal life, but also the constituent of social relativity: In the kingdom of light we transcend all characteristics of gender, status, tongue or nationality. In turn, the other three components of our being attain their own continuity: The body in progeny, the *nefesh* in universal life energy, and the *ruah* in the collective.[136] Modern cosmology, therefore, does not debase the Israelite four-tier paradigm any more than dissecting a heart obliterates the idea of love.

In addition, deciphering biblical metaphysics allows us to correct not only the dualist prejudice regarding the Hebrew Bible, but also our entire understanding of the canon. The process forces us to reconsider the common notion that it is a book of stories—one with moral lessons, but without a philosophical backbone. As we can now see, this is hardly the case. Indeed, the discovery of the elemental structure may provide an incentive to relate to the Hebrew canon as a whole, rather than as fragments.

The early appearance of the elemental theory, meanwhile, defies the conventional view regarding Greek influence on the Bible, especially in the wisdom writings—ideas that pushed the dating of Ecclesiastes, for instance, as late as the third century B.C.E. There is, now, more room to view late biblical ideas as drawing upon earlier Israelite thought, rather than Greek. At the same time, we have reason to connect teachings by medieval Jewish philosophers to their own traditional roots; when a Maimonides or a Saadia Gaon mentions the elements, it is not only because he is projecting an Aristotelian prejudice onto the Bible.

Last but not least, we now understand that the biblical aversion to picturing souls is deliberate. Israelite thought believed in a heavenly afterlife, but—by definition—not one than can be pictured, any more than pure wisdom can be given shape. For the Bible, then, even imagining souls with ghost-like bodily forms constitutes a philosophical aberration. Instead, the Bible teaches of a multi-layered afterlife, intertwined with the entire scope of existence. Its anthropocentric concept of the cosmos lends the Bible a powerful humanist angle, and at the same time highlights deep ecological and spiritual affinities between humankind and the rest of creation.

Above all, the notion of being created "in the image of God" may now acquire dramatic new meaning. Furthering this idea, I wish to conclude with an implication of these discoveries for the meaning of *kadish*, the ancient but mysterious Jewish prayer of mourning. As an orphan stands over a parent's grave, breaking his teeth on the Aramaic, he in fact utters no words at all in honor of the deceased. The *kadish* does not petition the deceased to intervene on behalf of those alive, or declare faith in God's judgment for the righteous, or seek to justify God's sovereignty over man's life, or even allude to death. Most pointedly—and with intriguing similarity to our analysis of the Bible's narrative—the prayer does not even mention souls, or the afterlife, or any Eden-like world of the dead. Instead, for a millennium, adherents of the Israelite tradition repeat a phrase that is intended to offer ultimate solace, and lend meaning to death: *Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmeih raba*, "magnified and sanctified be God's great name."[137]

Why choose these words for this moment? The biblical verse that stands behind the opening phrase of *kadish* teaches that the magnitude and sanctity of God's name are, in fact, not yet possible; they refer only to the fulfilled state of the world. Only when creation will be fully redeemed at the End of Days, says God, "I will magnify myself and sanctify myself."[138] Zechariah completes the message: "On *that* day the Lord will be one and his name one."[139] This is why the *kadish* is in the future tense, applicable "when his kingdom shall reign." The meaning, according to rabbinic sources, is that until the days to come, the name of God is somehow incomplete. We pray, therefore, for its renewed completeness.[140] The hymn in effect mourns for God, rather than for the dead.

Only when we appreciate that the essence of man's *neshama* lies precisely in the idea of an eternal "name" can the death of our beloved—or rather his or her posthumous existence—contribute to the completion of God's name.[141] What makes the *kadish* so poignant is that a man's name is carved out of the divine throne, and when it itself reaches a state of fulfillment it reunites with its source, the great name of God. By doing so, it adds a unique spark towards the latter's ultimate completeness. Man's acquired name, then, completes God's name. In praying for the completion and enlargement of God's name, the mourner relates the name of the deceased—the realized essence of his or her *neshama*—to the divine, as a purified identity. In Jewish philosophy, this is true, and eternal, salvation.

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Notes

1. The post-death souls most frequently seen in the New Testament are those of Abraham, Moses, and Elijah. Examples of sightings of souls include Luke 16:19-24, Mark 9:2-4, and Revelation 6:9, 20:4 (see also Luke 9:7-8, I Corinthians 15:42-49).

2. Koran 78:31 and elsewhere.

3. The one biblical story that pictures a man after death is that of Samuel appearing to the witch of Endor. The overtly pagan—and highly critical—context of the story serves only to reinforce the conclusion that Israelite thought itself was sketchy at best regarding the whole idea.

4. II Kings 2:12. Verse translations are mine, based on the King James Version (KJV) and Revised Standard Version (RSV) Bibles. Verse numbers are masoretic.

5. Though some interpret the idea of "going to Sheol" to mean no more than "going to one's death" or going to the grave. This questionable interpretation strips Sheol of its reality as a netherworld.

6. II Samuel 28:15.

7. II Kings 2:11; Genesis 5:24.

8. II Chronicles 21:12.

9. Daniel 12:1.

10. For example, the idea of the all-encompassing "breath of life."

11. For example, the idea of formless "shades" in the underworld. Indeed, so strong is this transference that in early translations of the Bible, the Greek concept for the underworld, Hades, is actually used to render the Hebrew "Sheol," thereby inserting a pagan deity into the Israelite canon.

12. H.W. Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Charles Scribner's, 1913), p. 83, cited in H.W. Robinson, "Soul (Christian)," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. xi (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 733.

13. Lynn de Silva, *The Problem of Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 75. See www.members.shaw.ca/mschindler/A/eyring_2_14.htm.

14. See www.elca.org/questions/Results.asp?recid=32.

15. Samuel G.F. Brandon, "Sacred Rites and Ceremonies," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 26 (1998), p. 805.

16. Paul's "unclean spirit" is a notable exception, but otherwise, *pneuma* is something a human soul can be either graced with, or deprived of, but never integrated with. Subsequently, it is only the one soul—not the spirit—that goes to heaven, or to hell.

17. Empedocles is credited by Aristotle as the first to articulate the four elements, albeit in a mythic form: "Hear first the four roots of all things: bright Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus, and Nestis, whose tears are the source of mortal streams." *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, ed. M.R. Wright (London: Bristol Classical, 1995), p. 164. (Zeus was the god of fire, Hera supposedly of wind, Aidoneus of earth, and Nestis of water.) The idea that these same four elements serve to explain the story of creation in Genesis is not new. Though the hierarchy suggested here is my own, as is the connection to souls, Maimonides and other Jewish scholars used the model in their biblical interpretations.

18. Ecclesiastes 1:4-7. Readers familiar with the Greek version will find the stanza striking not only because it describes all four elements, and none other, but also because it too stressed the issue of movement and direction. The vectors themselves, however, differ: In Ecclesiastes Earth is "still," rather than pulling down, and Wind circles neither up nor down. The two remaining vectors are identical: The sun, like all fire, rises upwards; and water, like all water, rushes down, running to the bottom of the sea. These up and down vectors will prove crucial.

19. Genesis 1:14.

20. Contrary to the common idea that links the word *shamayim* to *mayim*, i.e., water; the first consonant cannot be a prefix, while the *yim* suffix depicts only the double plural (or "dual") property of the Hebrew "heavens" (like *yadayim*-hands, *raglayim*-legs, etc.). Indeed, Strong's Lexicon sees *shamayim* as a dual of an unused singular *shameh*, from an unused root meaning to be lofty. Toward the end of the essay I will present a more plausible root to the double reflex. Poetic or etymological, then, the connection between *shemesh* and *shamayim* is implied.

21. Jeremiah teaches the same, when he refers to the predicament of *heavens* withholding their *light* (4:23).

22. In antiquity the heavenly bodies (such as star constellations) and the metaphysical beings (such as angels) were interchangeable, one and the same.

23. Ezekiel 1:13-14, 27-28.

24. Proverbs 30:4.

25. Psalms 18:8-12.

26. Other four-element examples may be found in Isaiah 40:12-13, Psalms 104:1-6, Jeremiah 10:12-13, and—as a decomposition process—Exodus 32:20.

27. Genesis 1:1-2. The interim clause deals explicitly with the original chaotic nature of the Earth dominion alone, stating, "and the *earth* was…."

28. Exodus 20:11.

29. Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8. The ten plagues also follow the hierarchical cosmos, from the deepest dark waters up to the lights of heaven, in a distinct ascent through the four hierarchical realms. The end of the essay reveals why the death of the firstborn, designate carrier of the family name, is manifest in the high heavens, above the sphere of the sun.

30. The Bible knows that rain falls from the sky. Nonetheless, the water in clouds originates from rising mists (Genesis 2:6, Job 36:27). Regarding all rain, the original source of the water is *tehom*, from which the water initially rose. This is why in the story of the flood, though the flooding came from a downpour of rain (no up-swell is mentioned), this downpour was released by first bursting open "fountains of the great deep" (Genesis 7:11). The verse is sequential: waters reached from *tehom*, up through "*arubot hashamayim*" (the socket/chimneys of heaven), to be released downwards to earth. In stopping the downpour, yet again, it is *tehom* that needed to first shut down (Genesis 8:2). Other mentions of these heavenly "sockets" have to do not with water, but with food and thunder. Interpreting them as pathways to the "upper waters" above the firmament is, therefore, suspicious. Even so, if you do read these sockets as releasing the "upper waters," then again the waters come from a place other than Heaven. In either reading, Heaven itself is made solely of fire and light. "Rains of *shamayim*," like "birds of *shamayim*," refer to a lower sky than the true celestial fire-sphere.

31. For Aristotle, all four elements relate to the sub lunar, terrestrial world. For him, the heavens aren't made of fire—nor can they represent a domain of fire—but rather they are made of a fifth element called *ether*. Also, the Aristotelian cosmos places earth underneath water, and not vice versa. Though sharing in name, Aristotle's four composite "terrestrial" elements—which exist to different degrees even in inanimate objects—have very little in common with the Bible's idea of the four metaphysical elements.

32. Genesis 3:19. See also Job 10:9, Ecclesiastes 3:20, and elsewhere.

33. *Basar*, itself, I believe, should actually be translated as "body" in a great majority of cases. Modern "clarity" as to the body-soul distinction does not prevent minor diffusion any more than biblical use (e.g., "strike the body, not the face"; "everybody went home"; "I didn't see a soul"; etc.). A careful analysis of each occurrence of *basar*, however, is beyond the scope of this article. The same limitation applies to the required verse-by-verse accounts of the Hebrew soul-terms and other significant concepts, as well as to detailed etymological, methodological, and historic cross-cultural argumentation. Throughout the article, I also smooth over many of the functional questions regarding the different elemental components

(e.g., their ailments, variations, etc.). The book that I am in the process of writing will address the inevitable omissions.

34. See Genesis 29:14; Judges 9:2; II Samuel 5:1, 19:13-14; Job 2:5, 10: 11; I Chronicles 11:1. When Adam says of Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23), it was in the very first moment that they both acquired the familiar gender-characterized bodies. In the Bible relations are never called of the same flesh and *blood*, for the blood flow is one's strictly *personal* share of life. Therefore, there is no such thing as a "blood relative."

35. Job 34:15.

36. Psalms 139:5.

37. Ibn Ezra on Job 1.

38. In the El Amarna Tablets one finds *haparu* with a non-guttural xet or even just *aparu*. This suggests that the '*ayin* in '*afar* might be—to some extent—a prefix. A link to *afar* (ashes), *hafar* (dig), and *kafar* (plaster), all substituting the '*ayin*, supports the same notion. Thus, *fr* or *pr* is a key that connects '*afar* to the root p-r-h for fertility.

39. Job 8:19.

40. Levin describes the /m/ as a "replacement of /*n/—if originally present…" on p. 42 of his discussion. S. Levin, "Semitic and Indo-European: The Principal Etymologies (with Observations on Afro-Asiatic)," *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* 129 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1995), pp. 40-44. Earlier on p. 41 he claims that "--n is revealed to be originally a suffix of some sort…." This means that without the suffix we are left with *etz* for both *etzem* (bone) and *etz* (tree). In Akkadian we find *isu* for "tree" and *esemtu* for "bone". But there are also occurrences of *esentu* or even *esettu*, without any /m/ or /n/. It seems that both may be connected to *(w)asu(m)* in the sense of "to grow." Thus one may link *etz* and *etzem* also in Akkadian, and perhaps associate both with the idea of growing. J. Yaacobovitz, in his book *Lashon Meshutefet* (Monogenics of Language), very naturally links *etz* to OS which is Latin for "bone" (Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1968, pp. 122-124).

41. Genesis 1:11.

42. Seeds that maintain "their kind" parallel Aristotle's idea of "a being-at-work-staying-itself of a first kind of a natural, organized body." Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2001), book 2, ch. 1, 412b. He defined the vegetative force as responsible for "self-nourishing as well as growth and wasting away." Aristotle, *On the Soul*, book 2, ch. 1, 412a 10. Through the body-plant analogy, this exact vegetative force is captured by the idea of *etzem*. The Bible and Aristotle both see this force as not really distinct from the body itself.

43. Compare also the plant-related words of *novel, alim, perah, nevet*, and *kotz* to their body-related counterparts: *nevela, alumim, efroah, beten,* and *kutzotav.* Other words, including *kaf*, *rakav*, and *zav*, are used interchangeably for both bodies and plants.

44. Isaiah 11:1.

45. Isaiah 66:14.

46. Ezekiel 16:7.

47. Psalms 92:12.

48. Ecclesiastes 1:4.

49. The compound term appears nine times in the Hebrew Bible, always regarding waters directly connected to their cosmic source, like those in a spring or a well. "Living waters" became the prerequisite of *tvila*, ritual immersion in water that wards off the contamination of death.

50. The link between *nefesh* and life appears five times as frequently as the connection between life and *ruah*. This is without counting the links between blood (i.e., *nefesh*) and life. Ten other verses link *nefesh* to life's opposite—death; the phrase *nefesh met* (a dead *nefesh*) has no parallel regarding *ruah*. Indeed, nine times is the *nefesh* itself called "alive" (*nefesh haya*), while the three *ruah-hayim* indicate a life-*enabling* breath. For higher animals, breathing is a prerequisite for living; it does not, however, embody life itself. Note 76 below explains the inevitability of these three exceptions due to their appearance in regard to the flood.

51. Genesis 1:20-21.

52. Leviticus 24:17-18.

53. Judges 16:30. See also Numbers 23:10, Ezekiel 18:20, Isaiah 53:12, and elsewhere.

54. Isaiah 53:12.

55. Psalms 119:28.

56. Numbers 11:6.

57. I Samuel 1:15.

58. II Samuel 14:14. See also Job 14:10-11: "But man dies and slacks; man expires, and where is he? As water evaporates from the sea, and a river parched and dried up." In both cases, death is signified by a seepage of water.

59. See Leviticus 17:11, Deuteronomy 12:23-24, and Ezekiel 16:6, respectively. The *nefesh*-blood connection appears in a dozen other verses. This idea of life

as animation, manifest in the perpetual flow of the bloodstream, survives to this day: When British pop singer Robbie Williams says, "I got too much life running through my veins," it is his *nefesh* that he is referring to.

60. "*Prana* (breath) is the living creature, the universal soul, the eternal Being, and the Mind, Intellect and Consciousness of all living creatures, as also all the objects of the senses. Thus the living creature is, in every respect, caused by *prana* to move about and exert." *The Mahabharata*, book 12: Santi Parva: sect. CLXXXV. Cited in www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m12/m12b012.htm

61. Though Homer also has occasion to relate *psuche* to blood.

62. "Sheol… woke up the *refaim* for you" (Isaiah 14:9). Proverbs (21:16) considers their state one of *resting*, and other verses talk of them needing "to be risen." Scholarship refers to these creatures repeatedly as the remaining *shades* of human beings. The quote from the *Britannica*, brought in the opening section of this article, continues: "The ancient Mesopotamians, Hebrews, and Greeks, for example, thought that after death only a shadowy wraith descended to the realm of the dead, where it existed miserably in dust and darkness…." However, there is absolutely no basis for this assertion. It is complete conjecture, drawing on the Greek idea of the posthumous shades in Hades. In truth, not a single biblical verse suggests that its own silent dwellers of the underworld were ever human beings, or that they are transformed souls. Nothing in the Bible implies, even hints, that when people or souls (of any sort) go down to the underworld, this is what they become. Rather, just like angels are the natural dwellers of heaven, *refaim* are their counterparts in the underworld domain.

63. Job 26:5.

64. Jonah 2:3-4.

65. Ezekiel 31:15.

66. II Samuel 22:6. See "The heathen *drown* in the rut of their doing… The wicked shall be turned into Sheol" (Psalms 9:16-18). Similarly, "the *rivers* of perdition assailed me… the pangs of Sheol encompassed me…" (Psalms 18:5-6). Psalm 124, with its mention of "malicious waters," refers in its entirety to the threat of being swallowed by Sheol.

67. Isaiah 14:15. See specifically *bor shaon* (Psalms 40:3), connecting *bor* to the gushing sound of the great deep waters. In this manner, Sheol relates to many early mythologies that depict the underworld as a Leviathan-like water-monster that *drinks* the dead. The book of Jonah plays on this theme as well.

68. Ecclesiastes 9:10.

69. Genesis 37:35.

70. "Let the wicked dry out (*yevoshu*), and let them bleed (*yidmu*) to Sheol"

(Psalms 31:18). This verse calls for the sinners' *immediate* and premature demise, and as Hebrew commentaries acknowledge, the second verb is *damam*, which has nothing to do with "similarity"; compare Jeremiah 51:6.

71. Or: *Dam* (blood) to *Duma* (another name for Sheol). Not to be mistaken for "silence," the term *damam* means to be stilled or "inanimate" (as a stone); it is the semantic opposite of *flowing* blood: "and I stilled (*domamti*) my *nefesh*" (Psalms 131:2).

72. In Isaiah 58:11 we find: "And the Lord will… satisfy your *nefesh* with good things, and make your bones strong—you shall be like a sated garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not"; *nefesh* is to a spring as bones are to a garden grove.

73. Psalms 104:30.

74. Ecclesiastes 3:19.

75. Genesis 7:15.

76. This is why the wording "*kol nefesh*," standing for "all life forms," never appears in this story. It couldn't have. Instead, we find the repeated qualifier of *ruah* when generalizing about the flood's destruction. For instance: "Behold, I do bring floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven *all* flesh in which is a *ruah* of life; everything that is *on earth* shall die" (Genesis 6:17). And later: "They went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of *all* flesh in which is a *ruah* of life" (Genesis 7:15). Needless to say, nowhere in the 389 references to *ruah* in the Hebrew and Aramaic scripture is the term ascribed to a non-breathing creature.

77. "Iguanas recognize their human handlers and greet them differently compared with strangers." Claire Bowles, "Lizards Do Really Learn to Recognize People," *New Scientist* (June 30, 1999).

78. There is a new scientific debate about fish. However, Paul J.B. Hart and Ashley Ward of the University of Leicester explain the questionable data as reflecting recognition of fish that come from the same close environment, not individuals: "Our work suggests that although fish can recognize familiar individuals they do not do it through individual visual recognition... Sticklebacks can recognize a familiar being from the same environment as themselves but they cannot recognize the fish as an individual it has encountered before." Paul Hart, "Finding a Friendly Faced Fish," *Planet Earth* (June 2004), cited in http://ebulletin.le.ac.uk/features/2000-2009/2004/11/nparticle-jwq-6wd-f4c. In any case, fish do not recognize human handlers and it is fair to assume that in biblical times fish-recognition data were unheard of (unlike higher animals, where their ability to recognize people was a first-hand experience).

79. Leviticus 22:28.

80. Deuteronomy 22:6.

81. Genesis 3:8.

82. Genesis 2:18.

83. Numbers 5:14.

84. Isaiah 54:6.

85. Genesis 26:35.

86. Judges 9:23.

87. Malachi 2:16. Loyalty and treachery are practiced between higher animals and their own peers, not only in regard to human handlers. Last year, in the journal *Animal Cognition* (April 2004, pp. 69-76), the behavioral biologist Thomas Bugnyar described a deliberately deceitful raven, and Frans de Waal's *Chimpanzee Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) shows many such cases in apes.

Loyalty is something that higher animals can manifest as well, just as they can feel shame for being "bad" or feel gratified for being "good." Other *ruah* verses are less straightforward, yet they too regard social personalities, as opposed to instincts, and physical well-being.

88. There is a direct connection between "smell" and *ruah* throughout the Bible; here the meaning is similar to "smelling out" the wicked—*using* the precise "*ruah* of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" he was reported to receive in the previous verse. The word "fear," *yira* can also be read as "perception."

89. Isaiah 11:4.

90. Judges 14:6.

91. Numbers 11:25.

92. II Kings 2:9.

93. I Samuel 10:6.

94. I Samuel 16:14.

95. Such mirror usage is common. Note that *shmama* means wilderness—back to the wild state of nature—and should not be misunderstood for desolation. Indeed overgrowth of wild fauna and flora are almost prerequisite: "Lest the land become *shmama*, and the beast of the field *multiply*…" (Exodus 23:29, also Jeremiah 49:33 and Ezekiel 14:15); "As long as it [the land of Israel] lies *shmama* it shall rest; because it did not rest in your Sabbaths" (Leviticus 26:35)—compensating for a sabbatical where "That which grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap…."). The only thing that *shmama* places are barren of is *human* inhabitants: "…a *shmama* forever; No man shall reside there" (Jeremiah 49:33);

"the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land become *shmama*" (Isaiah 6:11-12). The same reference to human habitation per se is apparent in the verb form *nasham*: "The highways lie deserted, the traveling man ceases" (Isaiah 33:8); "Let their habitation be forsaken, let no dweller in their tents" (Psalms 69:25).

96. Proverbs 20:27. Therefore we light a *ner neshama* as a candle for the deceased, and light Sabbath candles to undo the fact that "the *neshama* of the first man blew out (*kavta nishmato*)," Genesis Raba 17.

97. Isaiah 30:33.

98. Commentary on Genesis 7:19.

99. Genesis Rabba on Genesis 2:7.

100. Other cultures may have the same idea: "As for the inner light which plays a part of first importance in Indian mysticism and metaphysics as well as in Christian mystical theology, it is, as we have seen, already documented in Eskimo shamanism. We may add that the magical stones with which the Australian medicine man's body is stuffed are in some degree symbolic of solidified light (Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* [Bollingen Series LXXVI, Princeton, 1974], p. 508. Also: "Hippocrates says that the soul is an Immortal Warmth (*Athanatos Thermon*), which sees, hears and knows everything; most of this Warmth is pushed to the outermost sphere, where it is called *Aithêr*, and forms a kind of Fiery World Soul." Essay by the seventeenth-century scholar John Opsopaus on "The Ancient Greek Esoteric Doctrine of the Elements: Fire," cited in: www.cs.utk.edu/~mclennan/BA/AGEDE/Fire.html. "The Ancient Greek Esoteric Doctrine of the Elements: Fire, Fire in the Microcosm," extended version, 1999.

101. Shekalim 86a.

102. Jeremiah 5:14.

103. Psalms 19:1-4.

104. Psalms 119:89.

105. Genesis 2:7. The scope of this article does not allow for a full linguistic exposition. A few points, however, should be made. Genesis 2:7 correctly reads "and he kindled (*yipah*) in his inner-fire (*apav*) a *neshama* of life." *Yipah* is a form of *puah*—to kindle or set ablaze—as in Song of Songs 2:17: "Until the day blazes (*yapuah*) and the shadows flee away." It is cognate to *piah* (soot) and other fire-related words. As to *apaiv*, plural of *af*, we must recall that in over 90 percent of the 276 biblical appearances of *af* it denotes heated, fiery anger. The meaning of "nose" appears only half a dozen times, and always in the singular, being a secondary derivative of "*anaf*" (the nose is the place where inner seething is released). Etymologists agree that *af* comes from the original root a-n-f. Lipinski includes this

instance as an example where "assimilation between consonants takes place most often between a liquid *l*, *r* or the nasal *n* and another consonant… vowelless n assimilates regularly to a following consonant…." Edward Lipinski, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), p. 187. In Hebrew, the earlier a-n-f appears only in regard to fiery wrath, supporting the idea that "nose" is secondary. Indeed, biblical Hebrew has other words both for breathing (*nashaf* and *sha'af*) and for nostrils (*nahir*). That an inner fire was the seat of the soul is a known idea in antiquity. The only other possible translation of *apav* is "his countenance," based on cognate languages. In modern Hebrew, of course, *nasham* has come to mean breathing, yet this development is late, and probably reflects Christological influences. I must, therefore, contend with Jewish commentators who follow the Christian reading of this verse as relating to breath. Indeed it might not be a coincidence that only after receiving the *neshama* man's designation expanded from *adam* (of *adama*, earth) to include *ish* (relating to *esh*, fire). "Tefillin" (prayer phylacteries) thus symbolize human constitution: a shell of flesh (animal hide is obligatory), and a core of language allotted in divine words.

106. Job 26:4.

107. Job 27:3-4.

108. Job 32:8.

109. Daniel 10:17. Likewise, to become *shomem* means being dumbfounded. Losing one's *neshama* can mean losing the self-conscious, sentient ability associated with language; one becomes *inarticulate*.

110. Job 37:2-10.

111. II Samuel 22:16; Psalms 18:16.

112. Psalms 150:6.

113. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale, 1976), p. 242.

114. According to *The Comprehensive Arabic-Hebrew Dictionary*, the Arabic root s-m-w is the basic root of the noun *samaa*—sky in Arabic. A. Sharoni, 1999. *The Comprehensive Arabic-Hebrew Dictionary* (Tel Aviv: The Ministry of Defense, 1999), vol. 2, p. 735. In Hebrew, sh-m would be, then, the root (perhaps as two letters) behind the mysterious double plural of *shamayim* (heavens) as well, just as sh-d is to the Hebrew *shadayim* (breasts). See note 19 above. At the end, the direct *neshama*-fire connection is reinforced by proving both the fire-heaven and the fire-word links as well as independent links between *neshama* and heaven, and words (language), and between "the word" and heaven.

115. Jerusalem Sanhedrin 22.

116. Ecclesiastes 12:5.

117. Ecclesiastes 12:6-7.

118. François Daumas talks of "an identity between gold and sun" in ancient Egypt. François Daumas, "The Value of Gold in Egyptian Thought," *Religious History Review* 75, 1956, p. 4.

119. Isaiah 60:19.

120. Malachi 3:20.

121. Daniel 12:3. See also: "Light is sown for the righteous" (Psalms 97:11), and "To enlighten (*le'or*) in the light of [eternal] life" (Job 33:30).

122. For a possible derivative of this ancient Israelite idea, compare Revelation 19:12-13, regarding Jesus, "His eyes were as a flame of fire… and his name is called the Word of God."

123. Daniel 12:1.

124. Psalms 147:4.

125. Isaiah 66:22.

126. Job 14:12.

127. Isaiah 56:5.

128. Proverbs 10:7.

129. Deuteronomy 7:24. The destruction of the evildoers' names is equivalent to the destiny described in Isaiah 34:4: "The host of the heavens shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a book: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls from the vine, and as a falling [fig] from the fig tree." Other examples of the eradication of heavenly names include: "Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and *blot out their name* from under heaven" (Deuteronomy 9:14); "the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man… and the Lord shall *blot out his name* from under heaven" (Deuteronomy 29:20); "you have destroyed the wicked, you have *put out their name for ever and ever*" (Psalms 9:6, 9:5 in KJV). And it is this name destruction that the author of Lamentations calls upon his enemies: "Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens (*shmei*) of the Lord."

130. Deuteronomy 34:10.

131. Exodus 33:17. See also Exodus 33:12.

132. Exodus 32:32.

133. Isaiah 66:22.

134. Since God is indestructible and intrinsically aware, remembrance in God is a concrete reality—much more so, for instance, than a photo still "existing" in the

memory of a computer (a notion we easily accept). Thus the New Year, as a day of judgment, is called *yom hazikaron*—the day of "recall" of one's current-state name. The idea continued in Jewish tradition: "Three crowns were given to the people of Israel: the crown of the Law, the crown of Priesthood, and the crown of kingship. Rabbi Nathan said: And the crown of *shem tov* (a worthy name) supersedes them all" (Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon, 19:6).

135. The dynamic sphere ("life") is sequential and individual, while the relational sphere ("social convention") is synchronic and structural. In the philosophy of language, for instance, the four realms would correspond to the following: intention = the ideal sphere; semantics and pragmatics = the relational sphere; grammar = the dynamic sphere; and phonetics = the material sphere.

136. The final destiny of *ruah* remains something of an enigma even for Israelite philosophy itself, as Ecclesiastes (3:21) retorts, "Who knows the *ruah* of man, does it rise upwards (like the *neshama*), and the *ruah* of the beast, does it descend down beneath the earth (like the *nefesh*)?" By stipulating both, Kohelet hints that neither familiar option is correct. Two sources confirm that, in its own way, *ruah* does return to God, *elohim*. They, however, refrain from any association with the heavens. They imply, I believe, a returning of one's *ruah* to the framework *elohim* circling in the Garden of Eden, indeed to the very *ruah Elohim* that hovers forever over the waters of life.

137. Mourner's *kadish* is a thousand-year-old tradition, known from the Mahzor Vitri. At the graveside, though, *kadish* has been recited since talmudic times.

138. Ezekiel 38:23.

139. Zechariah 14:9.

140. See Tur Orah Hayim 56b.

141. Only by understanding the Bible's meaning regarding "The Name of God" will we grasp the meaning of our own, human, immortal names. While a comprehensive discussion of God's names demands a full essay in itself, a few things can be stipulated: First, God's various names are seen as distinct, characterized emanations of his omnipotent being. As such, they hold power over this world. God's name is a *function*, ruling over existence. Second, while his *being* is unattainable by us, his manifested *name* is the subject of our devotion and spiritual pursuit: "and praise thy *name* for ever" (Psalms 44:9). Last, God's name is eternal: "This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:15).