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## Posthumous Love in Judaism<sup>\*</sup>

This chapter responds to the stimulus of an editorial invitation, and to a claim that invitation contained: “The idea of ... marital faith after death is hardly imaginable in kin-based societies and in religious cultures that award the care of ancestors (as Jewish, Islamic, or ancient Roman cultures do or did) to offspring rather than to spouses.” Who could fail to be intrigued by such a declaration of limits on the possibilities of love? I know too little about love, and nothing of the posthumous kind. Yet out of desire to accept this invitation I have convinced myself that my ignorance can prove a virtue: that the discovery of the “imaginable” might be aided by uncertainty about what that imagining should look like. I have therefore undertaken a rash exploration of the vast ocean of premodern Jewish thinking about posthumous love. The goal of this exploration is not simply to determine whether love after death was or was not imaginable in Judaism. It is also to apply the by now well-known epistemological principle that the difference between the familiar and the unimaginable is not innocent. It is rather “theory laden,” the product of the habits with which we think ourselves in the world. Among those habits, limitations on the imagining of love are among the most venerable. What can the study of those limitations teach us about the ways in which the many sectarian communities that constitute Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have come to imagine their differences?

The charge is already large, but at the risk of incurring a condemnation even more severe, I’d like to begin by stressing that at least in its more general form, the topic of posthumous love has a dauntingly long history. In *Die Fackel im Ohr*, the second volume of his autobiography, Elias Canetti writes of how, while attending school in Weimar Germany, he discovered what would become his life’s work. Reading the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, he was struck by how the hero, confronted by the death of his friend Enkidu, refuses to accept the finality of loss and attempts instead to conquer the

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underworld. It is here, says Canetti, that he first encountered what he calls the “universal” phenomenon that would consume his attention for the rest of his intellectual life: the human desire that our love should overcome our mortality.

Canetti does not speak here of nuptial love, not only because at that age, so he claims, he still did not think of women in this way, but also because the epic did not do so. A decade later, however, he could have read a still older myth—from ca. 2000 BC, perhaps the oldest of which we have written record—recovered by Samuel Noah Kramer from the shards of Sumer and published by the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute in 1934. I mean, of course, the story of the goddess Inanna’s voyage to the underworld, relevant to our topic not only because it is the goddess of love who attempts to force her way into death’s domains, but also because of what happens upon her return to the world of the living. As she proceeds through her cities in search of a soul to take her place in the underworld (a condition of her release), she is met by those who have maintained themselves in mourning throughout her absence. All of these she refuses to send to the realm of death. But when she reaches her husband Dumuzi, he is sitting on his throne as if he had forgotten her, as if his love for her had ceased with her death. Moved to anger, she “fastened on Dumuzi the eye of death,” and loosed the underworld’s demons upon him. Later, after Dumuzi’s grieving sister Geshtinanna offers herself up in his place, an agreement is reached similar to those we know from the myths of love and fertility of other lands, in which the two will spend alternate halves of the year in the underworld.

It would be easy enough to find examples of the expectation that matrimonial relations should survive death in other ancient cultures. Plutarch, for example, collected several versions of the Egyptian myth of Osiris and his sister-wife Isis, who herself collected the dispersed fragments of her husband’s body after he had been slain and hacked to pieces by his brother Seth. She reassembled them all (except the penis, which had been eaten by an Oxyrhynchus fish; this she fashioned anew out of gold), and resuscitated him long enough to conceive the son (Horus) who would avenge his father. Such primordial couples occupy a prominent place in many theogonies, as Mircea Eliade pointed out long ago. Some of these couplings were happy ones, others not. But in either case, they were often happy or unhappy in ways that straddle the boundaries between the quick and the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Gods did not have a monopoly on an emotional afterlife. The human “family romance” was also sometimes imagined—at least in the cases of those heroic houses at

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<sup>1</sup> Plutarch *Isis and Osiris* 353–354, 358 A. See also Jean Hani, *La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris: Belles lettres, 1976), 323; and Christiane Desroches Noblecourt, *La femme au temps des Pharaons* (Paris: Stock, 1987), 21ff. For a long list of primordial couples, see Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 410–436.

the foundation of society—to persist in the underworld. Aeschylus gives us a chilling example in the *Agamemnon*, when he has Clytaemnestra tell the chorus that it is not their business who will mourn the murdered monarch:

This is no concern of yours.  
 The hand that bore and cut him down  
 will hand him down to Mother Earth.  
 This house will never mourn for him.  
 Only our daughter Iphigeneia,  
 by all rights, will rush to meet him  
 first at the churning straits,  
 the ferry over tears—  
 she'll fling her arms around her father,  
 pierce him with her love. (1578–1587)

Myself, I find few things more frightening than the idea that our loved ones will remember in the afterlife the ways in which we have hurt them in this one. Virgil's *Aeneid* provides some comfort, however slight. For although Dido's enmity toward Aeneas persists in the underworld—"At length she flung away from him and fled, / His enemy still, into the shadowy grove" (VI.634–635)—it also appears that the dead can forgive each other. In life Dido had broken the vow of perpetual chastity she had made to her dead husband—"The vow I took to the ashes of Sychaeus was not kept" (IV.778). But it is nevertheless in his company that Aeneas finds her in "the shadowy grove, / Where he whose bride she once had been, Sychaeus, / Joined in her sorrows and returned her love" (VI.635–636).

Of course it would be wrong to leap from Aeschylus's play or Virgil's poem to the argument that Athenians in the fifth century BC or Romans at the beginning of the first century AD understood relations of love and hate to persist in the afterlife. (Just how wrong can be seen from Glenn Most's contribution to this volume.) These texts do not claim to establish normative parameters of belief. At most we can say that Virgil (for example) hints at the existence of a strand of the Roman imagination that thought of widowhood unto death as a virtue, and of marital love as continuing into the hereafter. We could thicken that strand by pointing to other writers, such as Tacitus in his *Germania*, who proposed strict (i.e., lifelong, rather than serial) monogamy as an ideal.<sup>2</sup> But no amount of thickening will yield what we call dogma.

We might think that it would be very different with Judaism, which is, after all, a religion with a well-defined body of scripture and of law. Yet that scripture, at least when read without the benefit of elaborated exegesis, is notoriously terse on questions

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<sup>2</sup> Tacitus *Germania* 19 (p. 73): "Indeed those states are still better in which only virgins marry and the hope and prayer of a wife are accomplished once and for all. Thus they receive one husband as they have received one body and one life, that there may be no further thought on the matter, no continuing desire, that they may esteem not their husbands, so to speak, but the state of marriage." There are, of course, plenty of burlesques of this ideal, e.g., the Widow of Ephesus in Petronius's *Satyricon*.

about—even the existence of!—“the world to come” (*olam ha-ba*). The resurrection of the dead, for example, is mentioned more or less unambiguously only rarely in Hebrew scripture itself (notably in Daniel 12.2, “Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence,” and 12.13, “you shall rest and rise to your destiny at the end of days”). It is therefore not surprising that there was little agreement on such questions in the world of Second Temple Judaism. Josephus, for example, tells us of three groups competing for authority in the century leading up to the Jewish wars: Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees. Adherents of this last group, he says, deny the resurrection altogether, and “take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades.”<sup>3</sup>

Given that the afterlife was a major point of disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and that this disagreement endured for some two centuries (from the Hasmoneans until the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD), we might expect it to have left traces in the textual remains of the period. In fact, I know of no Second Temple source that addresses our question, or gives any detail at all about the nature of human–human relations (as opposed to human–God relations) in the afterlife.<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that such questions were not asked: on the contrary, we can be almost certain that they were, if we look beyond the documents preserved by Jewish communities, to those that we know as Christian. All three synoptic gospels, for example, represent the Sadducees as very concerned with the question of posthumous love, precisely as a way of ridiculing belief in resurrection. Let me just quote, as probably the earliest version, that of Mark 12:18–27:

Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” (Cf. Luke 20:27–40; Matthew 22:23–33)

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, bk. ii. chap. 8, sec. 14.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., in the seventh vision of Ezra in the chapters of 2 Esdra known as 4 Ezra, or the “Jewish apocalypse of Ezra.” The silence is all the more remarkable given the increasing importance of the afterlife in discussions of justice and theodicy identified by Shannon Burkes in *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Texts like Wisdom of Solomon 3.13 (“Blessed the sterile woman if she is blameless ... for she will have fruit at the visitation of souls”) suggest that lurking beneath this silence is a world of thought relevant to our subject. (Cf. Burkes, *God, Self, and Death*, 173.)

The passage is striking, not only because it makes clear that the early Jesus had a very different position on posthumous love than the medieval one, but also because it suggests that already in the Second Temple period the question of postmortem monogamy was well established as something of a staging ground for debates about resurrection and human relations in the world to come. All the more extraordinary that these questions *never*, so far as my limited knowledge extends (and that is a severe restriction), rise to the surface of the texts that have been transmitted to us from any of several scriptural communities of Late Antiquity that we today call Jewish.

The Talmud does contain traces of these questions, preserved primarily in material we call *aggadic* rather than *halakhic*, that is, in homiletic stories rather than in law or legal argument. Consider, for example, this story about Rabbi Hanina Ben Dosa and his unnamed wife. Rabbi Hanina is in some ways a “Jesus figure,” a wonder worker whose suffering sustains the world. As Tractate Ta’anith of the Babylonian Talmud has it, “Every day a Heavenly Voice is heard declaring, The whole world draws its sustenance because [of the merit] of Hanina my son, and Hanina my son suffices himself with a kab of carobs from one Sabbath eve to another.”

Hanina’s poverty is an ontological virtue, but it is also a social embarrassment, particularly for his wife. “Every Friday his wife would light the oven and throw twigs into it so as not to be put to shame. She had a bad neighbor who said, I know that these people have nothing, what then is the meaning of all this [smoke]? She went and knocked at the door.... A miracle happened and [her neighbor] saw the oven filled with loaves of bread and the kneading trough full of dough....” But it is the next miracle that concerns us more:

Once his wife said to him: How long shall we go on suffering so much: He replied: What shall we do? Pray that something may be given to you, [she replied]. He prayed, and there emerged the figure of a hand reaching out to him a leg of a golden table. Thereupon he saw in a dream that the pious would one day eat at a three-legged golden table but he would eat at a two-legged table. Her husband said to her: Are you content that everybody shall eat at a perfect table and we at an imperfect table? She replied: What then shall we do?—Pray that the leg should be taken away from you, [she replied]. He prayed and it was taken away. A Tanna taught: The latter miracle was greater than the former; for there is a tradition that a thing may be given but once; it is never taken away again. (BT Ta’anith 24b–25a)

From our point of view there is a great deal of interest in this passage: the hint (to put it in Christian terms) that we should not look for our treasure in this life but in the next; the implication that the righteous in the world to come live (or at least dine) in the same marital company as they did in this one; and the assumption that the same sociology of neighborliness (“keeping up with the Joneses”) that governs our world applies as well in the world to come. But note that the sages do not draw conclusions about the afterlife from the story; rather, they use it to make a point about the irrevocability of gifts human and divine.

In this sense the Talmud is representative of the vast corpus of rabbinic material surviving from roughly 100 AD to 1000 AD. I have managed to find midrashim, like this one dating to the eighth century, that suggest descriptions of marital life in the world to come:

All the orifices [of the body] will spew out milk and honey, as well as an aromatic scent, like the scent of Lebanon, as it is said: "Milk and honey are under your tongue, and the scent of your robes is like the scent of Lebanon" (Song of Songs 4.11). And "like seed" which will never cease [to flow from the bodies of the righteous] in the world to come, as it is said: "He provides as much for His loved ones while they sleep" (Ps. 127.2), and friends are none other than women, as it is said: "Why should my beloved be in my house?" (Jer. 11.15). Each righteous person will draw near his wife in the world to come and they will not conceive and they will not give birth and they will not die, as it is said: "they shall not toil for no purpose" (Is. 65.23).... and they will come to the world to come with their wives and children.<sup>5</sup>

But these stories are rarely treated by their transmitters as conveying literal information about the world to come. On the contrary, they are almost always contained within a framework (often provided by the ancient rabbinic editor of the material) discouraging or even negating any such conclusion.

Thus, when the great Saadia ben Joseph Gaon (Gaon is the title accorded the head of the Talmudic academy) took up questions of the resurrection in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*—a work often called "the first systematic presentation of Judaism," written in Arabic, and completed in 933—he brought up specific questions that were presumably familiar to his contemporaries as staging grounds for objections to the doctrine of resurrection: "But suppose a lion were to eat a man, and then the lion would drown and a fish would eat him up, and then the fish would be caught and a man would eat him, and then the man would be burned and turn into ashes. Whence would the creator restore the first man?" In this case, Saadia was willing to provide an answer to the question: matter is never completely annihilated, and since God has promised man resurrection, he preserves the necessary parts.<sup>6</sup>

But when it came to love, he was more discreet. The question was, "In the case in which those to be resurrected were married while they were alive in this world, will each man's wife return to him because of the fact that she had formerly lived with him, or does death dissolve all marital ties?" Saadia in his answer pointed out that the Talmud, responding to a question about religious rituals in the afterlife, had deferred the question to that future itself: "inasmuch as our teacher Moses will be with them [in the world to come], it is not necessary to rack our brains about the matter." All the more so,

<sup>5</sup> *Midrash Alpha-Betot, Batei Midrashot*, II, ed. S. A. Wertheimer (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1980), 458, cited by Charles Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul: Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* [Kitab al amanat wa'l-i'tiqadat], trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 278. Similar questions asked later by medieval Christians have enjoyed renewed attention in works such as Carolyn Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption*.

said Saadia, in the case of marriage. “Our minds,” he explained, “are capable only of grasping our present state. As for what is forbidden or permitted in a situation that has no parallel at all in our earthly existence, such as whether or not marriage bonds will be abrogated for those who are resurrected, we need not concern ourselves therewith, since there will be available in the beyond prophets and prophetic inspiration and divine guidance.” It seems that the question of posthumous love here has achieved a limit status something akin to mystery: concerning a great many, but imprudent to speculate upon.<sup>7</sup>

Some two centuries later an even starker silence was maintained by an even greater systematizer: Moses ben Maimon, known as Maimonides or the Rambam. Maimonides is often considered the founder of Jewish “dogma.” He articulated, for example, the thirteen “principles of faith” that every Jew must believe in order to be counted among the Jews and have a portion in the world to come.<sup>8</sup> Maimonides included belief in the resurrection of the dead among these thirteen (although he himself was repeatedly accused of denying it). And he was very well aware that there were many questions and many stories about the life of the resurrected. In his late “Epistle on the Resurrection” (1191) he called these “homilies and curious tales, of the sort that women tell one another in their condolence calls.”

These tales he resolutely refused to address, on two principled grounds. First, the resurrection itself is a miraculous event. As such it answers to no necessity other than God’s promise, and cannot usefully be reasoned about. All our questions will be answered, but only in the event. In the meantime, it is as useless to speculate about (for example) whether we will or will not be resurrected in our burial shrouds, as it would be to ask why, in the miracle before Pharaoh, Aaron and Moses’ staff turned into a serpent rather than a lion. Maimonides’ second reason for silence was that, according to him, the resurrection of the dead is not the end-stage of salvation history. The resurrection will take place in this world, and the resurrected will live embodied in this world, albeit in the Messianic Era. Our true and final goal, however, is the world to come, and in that world, according to Maimonides, there will be only disembodied intellect. Digestive organs, limbs, genitals: all will be superfluous, and equally superfluous all questions about them, including those pertaining to the loves of the body.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Saadia Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 282 [*Kitab al amanat wa'l-i'tiqadat*, 231], citing BT Nidda 70b: “When they will be resurrected we will go into the matter. Others say: When our master Moses will come with them.” Cf. Maimonides, “Essay on resurrection,” *Epistles*, 321.

<sup>8</sup> The principles are given in the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Tractate Sanhedrin, chap. 10. See Sara Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, on the relationship between Maimonides’ dogmatic reformulation of Judaism and broad trends in Islamic thought, particularly the “fundamentalism” of Ibn Tummart (ca. 1080–1130) and his followers, the *al-muwahhidun* (Almohads), “proclaimers of God’s One-ness.”

<sup>9</sup> Maimonides, “Epistle on the Resurrection,” in *The Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership*, trans. A. S. Halkin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). On the Epistle, see the scholarship collected by Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization’s*



Maimonides' example permits us perhaps to say something about why an idea, such as that of posthumous love, may be widely dispersed within a culture and yet leave few textual traces within it for the future. That such ideas were widely dispersed in Maimonides' world is certain. He himself tells us as much in a letter to a merchant who had written to Maimonides, describing himself as an *am ha-aretz*, an uneducated person who knows no Hebrew, and asking the sage about his views on the resurrection. Maimonides' reply may strike us as surprisingly gentle, even resigned. Do not consider yourself an ignoramus, he writes, but our beloved pupil, as is anyone who desires to study even one verse or single law. As for the next world:

It will not be detrimental to your religion to believe that the inhabitants of the world to come are bodies, until you clearly understand their existence. Even if you think that they eat, drink, and procreate in the upper heaven or in Gan Eden, as it was said—there is no harm in that. There are worse things regarding which people are ignorant, without their ignorance being detrimental to them. (Epistles, 414)

Maimonides was the champion of a philosophical Judaism for whom the anthropomorphization of God—indeed the attribution of any material attributes to him—ranked among the grossest errors. How then to explain his apparent tolerance for the anthropomorphization of the world to come, and the materialization of its “rewards”?

Maimonides' own answer to this question appears in his commentary on Helek, the Mishnaic chapter from BT Sanhedrin, chapter 10. That paragraph runs: “All Jews have a share in the world to come, as it is said, ‘Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting; the work of my hands wherein I glory’ (Is. 60.21). But these have no share in the world to come: one who says that the resurrection of the dead is not taught in the Torah....” “I must speak now,” writes Maimonides, “of the great fundamental principles of our faith.” He then describes five groups of confused believers whose misunderstandings are so widespread as to make it “almost impossible to find anyone whose opinion is uncontaminated by error.”<sup>10</sup>

All five groups he describes—including the ones that believe “that a man will live after his death and return to his family and dear ones and ... never die again”—are confused about the ultimate good, mistaking the means for the end in itself. Maimonides offers his readers an analogy for this confusion: Think of a child who is bribed with things “that a child loves in a childish way” in order to get him to do what he does not otherwise want to do, as when a teacher says, “Read, and I will give you some nuts or figs, I will give you a bit of honey.” God's scriptures offer humanity instruction in much the same way, tempting them toward their ultimate ends by means appropriate to the stage of development at which they find themselves. If at first one toils for the

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*Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 584, n. 37; and Sara Stroumsa, *On the Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: Yosef ibn Shim'on's Silencing Epistle Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Maimonides, commentary on Helek (Sanhedrin, chap. 10), trans. by Arnold J. Wolf in “Maimonides on Immortality and the Principles of Judaism,” *Judaism* 15 (1966): 95–101, 211–216, 337–342.



sweet, later one will toil for the pleasure of reading: “A man ought always to labor in the Torah, even if not for its own sake. For doing it not for its own sake, he may come to do it for its own sake” (BT Pesahim 50b).

According to Maimonides, passages that suggest bodily pleasures in the afterlife are the seducing sweet, to be left behind as soon as one acquires the habits and capabilities for more substantial spiritual nourishment. In this they are like anthropomorphic descriptions of God, a device by which scripture accommodates itself to the varying capabilities of the faithful. Elsewhere (in the *Guide of the Perplexed*), Maimonides will famously adapt a curious Arabic word to describe this accommodation: *Talattuf*, roughly translated (in Maimonides’ usage) as “shrewdness in the service of loving kindness.”<sup>11</sup> In the commentary on Helek (as in the *Guide*, for that matter), this doctrine of accommodation allows him to articulate a vision of religious learning in which it is the scholar’s obligation to strive always to move from serving for the promise of reward to serving purely for the love of God.<sup>12</sup> He characterizes this movement also as a hermeneutic one, from the literal meaning of “fantastic and irrational” texts about God and the world to come, to their “exceedingly profound truths,” their “hidden,” “real inner meaning.” Ultimately those capable of such movement will leave behind the possibility of any question about embodied life in the world to come. For the rest, such questions will remain acceptable, even necessary, for belief.

If I’ve spent so much space on Maimonides, it is not only because his systematization of Jewish beliefs in works like the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah* came to stand for whatever we might call dogma in Judaism, but also because his philosophical critique of some of those beliefs in works like the *Guide* and the commentary on Helek helps to explain why questions, such as those concerning posthumous love, that are urgent and widespread within one register of a culture can take very different—in this case much attenuated—form within another. Our sense of the shape and importance of such questions will therefore very much depend both on structures of source production and accidents of survival (in this case, for example, our sources for the ancient and medieval beliefs of the “uneducated” come from the hands of redactors, “editors,” and systematizers with very different principles), and on the nature of our own interests, which compel, to some extent, our attention in particular directions. On questions of love and the afterlife, questions that are themselves deeply implicated in the processes by which the many forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have differ-

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<sup>11</sup> Rémi Brague, “La Ruse Divine (Talattuf): Quelques Textes Nouveaux,” in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 17–26.

<sup>12</sup> Quoting *Sifrei* on Deuteronomy 11.13: “Should you be tempted to say ‘I will study Torah in order to become rich, or in order to be called Rabbi, or in order to receive a reward in the world to come,’ Scripture says ‘to love the lord your God’: whatever you do, it is only out of love.” Compare Matthew 23.

entiated themselves from one another over time, those interests and that attention are not independent or innocent of our preconceptions about what those differences are. It is important to notice that, if we shift our focus from one register of a culture to another, or from one type of source to another, our sense of those differences—including those involving posthumous love—may also shift a great deal. We might, conversely, deliberately deploy such shifts to challenge our preconceptions about these differences. Gershom Scholem achieved this goal when he shifted his attention to kabbalistic mystical and Messianic strands of medieval and early modern Judaism that had been more or less ignored by the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*). Scholem in fact set out on this exploration with the explicit intention of “rediscovering” a Judaism different from what he took to be the alienated one of Enlightenment and assimilationist modernity. One of the many differences he discovered has to do with our question of love after death.

This is not the place to attempt an explanation of kabbalistic understandings of God, except to say that these made room for feminine and masculine attributes (*sefirot*) within the Godhead.<sup>13</sup> Already the medieval kabbalists of the Castilian and the Catalan schools attributed to the divine itself a history of separation and reunification, of alienation, yearning, and recuperation, and often understood that history in terms of analogies drawn from human spheres of love and the erotic.<sup>14</sup> In *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (The Holy Letter), for example, the great Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) or one of his students undertook to show how knowledge of and union with God is achieved through “proper sexual intercourse.” The project was explicitly posed as a philosophical polemic: “The matter is not as Rabbi Moses of blessed memory said in his Guide of the Perplexed. He was incorrect in praising Aristotle for stating that the sense of touch is shameful for us. Heaven forbid! The matter is not like the Greek said.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On kabbalistic terminology on the Godhead, the foundational work is Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> As Scholem put it in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken, 1946), 225: “It is well known that those deepest regions of human existence which are bound up with the sexual life play an important part in the history of mysticism.” The phenomenon has become even better known since he wrote those words, thanks to the work of scholars like Charles Mopsik (e.g., *Lettre sur la santeté – Le secret de la relation entre l’homme et la femme dans la cabala* [Lagrasse: Verdier, 1986]; *Sex of the Soul* [see note 6]); Moshe Idel (e.g., *Kabbalah and Eros* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009]; “Sexual Metaphors in Praxis and the Kabbalah,” in *The Jewish Family*, ed. David Kraemer [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 197–225); and Elliot Wolfson (e.g., *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995]; and “Woman: The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah. Some Philosophical Observations on the Divine Androgyne,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Identity and Culture*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn [New York: New York University Press, 1994]).

<sup>15</sup> *The Holy Letter: A Study in Jewish Sexual Morality*, trans. Seymour J. Cohen (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), 72–73.

Texts like the *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* make clear that we should speak of more than one stream of “philosophical Judaism” (the Kabbalah is in fact often understood in neo-Platonic terms), and that in some of these streams marital intercourse remained a powerful way to imagine the overcoming of the gap between God and creation: so powerful, in fact, that soul and body, God and matter, might even become one flesh in nuptial union. In this sense, we should perhaps draw a (not very straight) line from treatises like the *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* to the *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit* (two tablets of the covenant) of the early seventeenth-century kabbalist R. Isaiah ben Abraham ha-Levi Horowitz (also known by acronym as the ShlaH, R. Horowitz served among other things as the head of the rabbinical court of Frankfurt until the Fettmilch massacres and the expulsion of the Jews from that city). “In one respect,” wrote Horowitz, “the body and the soul are both equal: i.e., both are spiritual, as was the first man before the fall and as he will be in the future.... Even earthly matter becomes spiritual again and both will have the same value. This is the goal: [that the body and the soul] are eternal....”<sup>16</sup>

The possibilities for posthumous love are obviously very different in this cosmos of kabbalistic neo-Platonism than they were in that of Maimonidean Aristotelianism. Indeed the kabbalists’ theories of the transmigration of souls—theories that make room for the soul’s repeated movement across the temporalities of being in Paradise, earthly life, and the world to come—undercut the very distinction between “humous” and “posthumous” love. Many kabbalists believed that souls are paired in Paradise before their incarnation; that once incarnate they can alienate themselves from this destined love through sin; that reincarnation provides the opportunity for atonement and recuperation; and that this reincarnation can take place across genders, with, for example, a male soul being punished for homosexuality by incarnation into a female body. In such a cosmos, love affairs take place across multiple bodies, genders, and generations.<sup>17</sup>

Consider the case of the great Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488–1575), whose *Shulhan `Aruch* remains a standard compilation of rabbinic law. In his *Maggid Mesharim*, the rabbi provides a mystical explanation (revealed by his spirit guide) for his wife’s infertility.<sup>18</sup> Her soul, he explains, was that of a great male sage who had been miserly in sharing his money and his knowledge. As punishment, that soul had been reincarnated in the body of a woman who would marry a sage (that is, Karo himself) who would be generous with his learning.<sup>19</sup> Later, Karo’s wife was impregnated by sparks from a fe-

<sup>16</sup> *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit*, vol. 1, fol. 20a, marginal note 25. Tr. Mopsik, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent introduction to kabbalistic ideas about reincarnation and spirit possession, see Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> On Karo, see R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Although these ideas are best known from their development in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century kabbalistic schools of teachers like Isaac Luria, Hayyim Vital, and Joseph Karo, they have much earlier antecedents. See, for example, the suggestions of Ezra of Girona, circa 1225, about the spir-

male soul, and she then became fertile. This is not the place to discuss how sparks of soul work, or how one body-soul pairing can be temporarily impregnated by a righteous soul (*`ibbur*) or possessed by an evil one (*dibbuk*). It is simply worth noting that according to many kabbalistic schools, most famously in those of Rabbi Ḥayyim Vital and his students, multiple souls and spirits could coexist within one body, so that although marital union was monogamous in a carnal sense, it might not necessarily be so in a spiritual one. Within such a system it was not even easy to know what soul a child was conceived from: that of the mother, or that of a migratory “temporary resident” such as an *`ibbur*.

My goal in these brief excursions through the writings of Maimonides and those (very different) of the kabbalists is not coverage but confusion: a dizzying glimpse of the many possibilities for posthumous love within a religious culture capable of simultaneously containing multiple visions of the cosmos. I have not yet begun to exhaust those visions: on the contrary, I have come across yet other types of sources that suggest whole worlds largely inaccessible to me. It is clear, for example, that within the specific local context of the Rhineland, the martyrdoms of Jews during the First and Second Crusades precipitated new crystallizations of love both marital and fraternal. What visions of companionship in eternity animated the martyrs as they slit their children’s throats, their spouses’, their siblings’, their companions’, and their own? The chronicles and poems (*piyyutim*) of lamentation tell us little, although occasionally we hear a faint echo of an animating hope, as in this account from the Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson:

that same day... the enemies of the Lord came to a certain village, and in the evening the Jews there also truly sanctified God’s Name. Bridegrooms and beautiful brides, old men and old women, boys and girls—they all extended their necks and slaughtered one another, giving up their lives in sanctification of God’s Name in the ponds around the village. When the enemy approached the village, some of the pious men ascended the tower and cast themselves into the Rhine River, which flowed around the village, and perished by drowning. Only two young men were not able to die by drowning: Samuel, the bridegroom, son of Gedaliah, and Yehiel, son of Samuel. They were “pleasant in their lives,” greatly loving each other, “and in their death they were not divided.” When they resolved to cast themselves into the water, they kissed each other, and held each other, and embraced each other around their shoulders, and wept to each other, saying: “Woe for our *partnership*, for we were not given the privilege of seeing it produce offspring, and we have not attained old age. Nevertheless, let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, Who is God, Trustworthy and Merciful King. It is better for us to die here for His Great Name and walk with the righteous in the Garden of Eden than to fall into the hands of these impure uncircumcised ones and be forcibly defiled by them with their evil water”.... Fulfilling the Biblical verse “and in their death they were not divided.”<sup>20</sup>

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itual reasons for infertility, discussed in Scholem, *Major Trends*, 227, citing Ezra’s Commentary on the Aggadot, partially printed in *Liqqutei Shechechah u-Feah* (Ferrara, 1556), folio 14b.

<sup>20</sup> Trans. Shlomo Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 51, with the exception of the word in italics. Eidelberg’s translation was based on Abraham Habermann’s edition, with the erroneous reading לבהרות (p. 45). Eva Haverkamp

It may well be that, among the many consequences of these traumatic events for the Jewish cultures of German-speaking lands, was a local revalorization of the power of earthly loves to endure across the bounds of death. But again, in order to reconstruct such a revalorization we would need to recuperate traces that lie scattered across diverse and often contradictory strands of Jewish culture.

In this case, for example, we might look to local interpretations of Jewish law on the remarriage of widows. The Talmud itself contains diverse opinions on the question of whether or not a widow or widower should remarry. Arguments in favor of remarriage as an ideal could draw on diverse texts. My favorite is BT Baba Bathra 3b–4a, which recounts how Herod's wife, the Hasmonean princess Mariamne (her name is not stipulated in the text), threw herself from a tower when she learned of her husband's low lineage, namely, that he had been a slave. The text continues, "He preserved her body in honey for seven years. Some say that he had intercourse with her, others that he did not. According to those who say that he had intercourse with her, his reason for embalming her was to gratify his desires. According to those who say that he did not have intercourse with her, his reason was that people might say that he had married a king's daughter."

Josephus had earlier related how, after Mariamne's death, Herod tried in hunting and banqueting to forget his loss, but failed and fell ill in Samaria, where he had made Mariamne his wife. But in the Talmud, Herod became a type for necrophilia, for love that clings too long to its object—a derangement that the Talmud elsewhere calls a "deed of Herod" (Sanhedrin 66b)—and a proof text for legal arguments about the desirability of remarriage.<sup>21</sup> Yet the Talmud also contains material that suggests the virtues of widowhood as monument to a righteous spouse. According to BT Bava Metsia 84b, whenever the widow of the pious Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon was approached with an offer of marriage, she would respond with a pithy proverb: "Where the master of the house once hung his weapon, should the simple shepherd now hang his pack?"

The rabbis of the Rhineland seem to have reinterpreted such Talmudic passages, applying them in new ways to the questions of their own day. For example, when the

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(pp. 412–415) found the manuscript to read *חברותינו*, "our friendship, partnership," which she translated as "woe for our spouses." It could also, however, refer to the homosocial relationship between the two men, in which case the implication seems to be that their friendship will be fulfilled among the righteous in the world to come. "They were not divided" is a quote from Samuel II 1.23. ("Let us now fall" is also a citation, echoing David's words to the prophet Gad.) There may also be an echo here of an ancient midrash on Lamentations, in which the two children of the high priest Zadok, enslaved, separated, and carried off after the fall of Jerusalem, are eventually forced together by their owners to breed. Recognizing each other by a birthmark, they "embraced each other and kissed each other until their souls departed." Midrash 'Eikha Rabba I.16, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1899) 42b; cf. BT Gitṭin 58a. See Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 84.

<sup>21</sup> Josephus on Herod's sorrow: Ant. xv. 7, § 7. The Mariamne tower in Jerusalem, built by Herod, was presumably named after her. On BT Baba Bathra 3b–4a, see S. Geiger, "Ozar Nehmad," iii. 1.

*Sefer Ḥasidim* (Book of the Pious, twelfth to thirteenth centuries) emphasizes the virtues of remarriage as emphatically as possible, it tells a story in which a widow professes the willingness to martyr her own children rather than discourage a new husband from his pious matrimonial purpose by the obligation to maintain them. More practical approaches to questions of a new husband's responsibility for the maintenance of children from a spouse's previous marriages of course abound in the legal literature of medieval Ashkenaz (the *Sefer Ḥasidim* is not a legal text). What is interesting, for our purposes, about this rather horrifying limit case is that it hints at the new centrality of martyrdom in thinking about the "time-boundedness" of matrimony. And yet this centrality does not produce dogma. Indeed the *Sefer Ḥasidim* itself deploys martyrdom to make the opposite point as well, emphasizing the eternal marital commitments of the most pious: in memory of the righteous, the widow of a martyr should not remarry.<sup>22</sup>

In still other genres we can even find hints that the monogamous prerogatives of martyrs could be broadened into a spousal ideal for the righteous. An early modern (1602) collection of tales called the *Maysebuch* (or *Maassebuch*) tells the story of the pious Rabbi Josse the Galilean, visited by the angel of death, who warns him of his impending demise. The rabbi negotiates for enough time to tell his wife the news, but she is so upset by it that he promises to return every Sabbath and festival evening to say the kiddush for her as he has always done. He keeps his promise for some time, until some people walking by the widow's windows hear a man's voice saying kiddush and accuse her of keeping a man in the house. The rabbi reappears in order to accompany his wife before the rabbinical court, where he defends her honor and announces to the terrified court that henceforth they shall never see him or his wife again in this world. The good wife, who has been sadly mourning all these years, now dies of melancholy, presumably (the point is not made explicit) following her husband into the world to come.<sup>23</sup>

Stories like these often have a Talmudic "source," in this case BT Ketuboth 103a. Ketuboth is ostensibly a treatise on marriage, but here the occasion is a commentary on

<sup>22</sup> These texts from the *Sefer Ḥasidim* are discussed, and much additional bibliography provided, in Susanne Borchers, *Jüdisches Frauenleben im Mittelalter: Die Texte des Sefer Chasidim* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 63–67. The story of the widow willing to martyr her children is at Pl. 173a/BIII,680b. The *Sefer* also gives the example of a man who refuses the exhortation to remarry out of his love for his deceased wife, by whom he had a son and a daughter. Both children then died (that their death was a punishment for his excessive mourning is not stated), leaving him childless. The moral: it would have been better had he remarried and had more children. My thanks to Eva Haverkamp for bringing these and the following sources to my attention.

<sup>23</sup> I consulted Ludwig Strauss, *Geschichtenbuch aus dem jüdisch-deutschen Maaßebuch ausgewählt und übertragen* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 69–73. But see esp. *Ma'aseh Book: Book of Jewish Tales and Legends*, ed. Moses Gaster (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1934/1981). A more recent German translation also exists: *Das Ma'assebuch: Altjiddische Erzählkunst*, ed. Ulf Diederichs (Munich: dtv, 2004). On the redaction history of the tales, see in addition to the above, Jakob Meitlis, *Das Ma'assebuch: Seine Entstehung und Quellengeschichte* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1933).



the death of the great late-second-century Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (also called Judah the Prince, or as here, simply Rabbi), traditionally considered the redactor of the Mishnah. “Rabbi said on his death bed: ‘The light shall continue to burn in its usual place, the table shall be laid in its usual place [and my bed] shall be spread in its usual place.’ What is the reason?—He used to come home again at twilight every Sabbath Eve. On a certain Sabbath Eve a neighbor came to the door speaking aloud, when his handmaid whispered, ‘Be quiet, for Rabbi is sitting there.’ As soon as he heard this he came no more, in order that no reflection might be cast on the earlier saints.” Comparing the *Maysebuch*’s version with that of Ketuboth, it is evident just how much both the marital and the otherworldly implications have been expanded. But the cultural work through which this expansion was achieved, and the nature of that expansion’s extension into other registers of Ashkenazic culture: of these scarcely a trace remains in the sources.

I hope that this accumulation of anecdotes has convinced you that posthumous love was not only imaginable in Judaism, but that its imagining took place in manifold and often contradictory ways in diverse corners of a complex culture. Some of these corners have received the attention of historians, others have been more or less ignored: a choice that is often the result of what preconceived notion of “Judaism” we begin looking with. It is worth stressing that this a priori commitment is itself often the product of an underlying polemic within and across religions. For example, the rationalist “Judaism” emphasized by enlightened Western European Jews was very much developed with an eye on the Christianity of their neighbors; just as Scholem’s turn to the Kabbalah was, on the other hand, very much a rebellion against what he considered the “Protestantized” Judaism of modern German Jews. And of course the ways in which Christian scholars and philosophers studied these questions were very much informed by their starting assumption that Judaism was a religion incapable of love. Hegel, writing of Abraham in “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” can serve as a representative example: “His Ideal subjugated the world to him, gave him as much as he needed, and put him in security against the rest. Love alone was beyond his power....”<sup>24</sup>

All of this means that, in asking questions about Jewish love, whether in this world or the one to come, we must be willing to strip ourselves of a great deal of what we think we know. The same is true in asking questions about Islam, for here too, the

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<sup>24</sup> Hegel’s thinking about the Jewish incapacity for love is structurally central to his history of Spirit. “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” was an early salvo in that history, first published by Herman Nohl in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1907), and translated into English by T. J. Knox in *Early Theological Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; reprint Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). See pp. 185–187, also 194, 196, 199, 202, and passim. Readers interested in exploring the further significance of Jewish lovelessness in Hegel’s thought can turn to Joseph Cohen, *Le Spectre Juif de Hegel* (Paris: Galilée, 2005).



Christian West has too often asked its questions with an eye toward proving that—to quote August Wilhelm von Schlegel—Islam was too “cruel” to know anything of love.<sup>25</sup> T. E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”) provides a charming account of such stripping in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, when he describes himself bathing blissfully in Wadi Rumm:

a grey-bearded, ragged man with a hewn face of great power and weariness, came slowly along the path till opposite the spring: and there he let himself down with a sigh upon my clothes spread out over a rock beside the path... He heard me and leaned forward, peering with rheumy eyes... After a long stare, he seemed content, and closed his eyes groaning, “The love is from God; and of God; and towards God.” His low-spoken words were caught by some trick distinctly in my water pool. They stopped me suddenly. I had believed Semites unable to use love as a link between themselves and God.<sup>26</sup>

This is not the place to embark upon an exploration of posthumous love in Islam. Yet even for this essay on Judaism, Lawrence’s experience provides a fitting conclusion. I say this not only because he attributes the failures of love he had previously imagined to “Semites” without specification. The general point is more important: his revelation offers us a reminder, in a key resonant with current concerns about the legacies of “Orientalism,” that our beliefs about love and our politics of difference have a long history of intimate embrace.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençales* (Paris: Librairie grecque-latine-allemande, 1818), 67–69. For more on this aspect of European thought about Islam, see my “Islam and the West: Two Dialectical Fantasies,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1 (2008): 1–33.

<sup>26</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Penguin, 1926/1985), 364–366.

<sup>27</sup> For a more general approach to this embrace, see my article “The Politics of Love and its Enemies,” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Spring 2007): 573–605. For a survey of Islamic views on the afterlife, see Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Appendix B, “The Special Case of Women and Children in the Afterlife,” 157–182. For an interesting subcase focused on martyrdom and posthumous love, see Maher Jarrar, “Martyrdom of Passionate Lovers: Holy War as a Sacred Wedding,” in *Myths, Historical Archetypes, and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Toward a New Hermeneutic Approach*, Proceedings of the International Symposium in Beirut, 1996 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 87–107.