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“What Jews Believe about Life and Death,” 1904 October 24.

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OCT. 24th 1904.

WHAT JEWS BELIEVE ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH.

Psa. 8 & Deut. 30- 11-

There is a development of the idea of the future life in the Bible. It is vain for us to read into the Old and the New Testaments our modern conception of immortality. The Bible speaks of Shomajim and Sheol, Heaven and Hell, we translate, but the translation is incorrect. Sheol is not Hell and Shomajim is not Heaven, as the moderns conceive them. The ancient Jews believed in resurrection and modern Orthodox Jews still continue prayers for resurrection. The resurrection idea develops in Israel after contact with the Babylonians and the Persians. Man lives in two worlds, in this world and the world to come. Resurrection is fundamental with Christianity, but reformed Jews do not believe in resurrection.

Jews cherish the hope for a future life. The thought of the world to come has been growing in Israel. The Old Testament has few clear references to the after life. The emphasis of the old Law book and the emphasis of all our Jewish thought is upon life on earth.

Genesis teaches that God made man in his own image. God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Science speaks no clearer truth. Life appeared eons ago, whence and how, science knows not. The highest science has been unable to create any living organism with the life spirit and the life principle within it. Life always comes from life. Man ever searches the beginnings. The fact remains we live. All-important are the purpose and the destiny of life.

The philosophy of the Hindus teaches the end of life to be Nirvana - annihilation. Characteristic of Christianity is the thought that life is burden and sorrow and pain and that death brings release. Christian hymnology sings a constant refrain - the bliss of heaven and the burdens of earth. Judaism emphasizes life, life and duty on earth. Life is joy and sorrow, pain is mingled with pleasure and evil is constant attendant upon good. Judaism announces - See, I have set before thee life and good, death and evil; choose ye the good, that ye may live. Manhood and womanhood are noble and not debased. Fundamental is Jewish emphasis of the worth of life.

Jewish thought is of life and not of death. Jews respect and reverence their dead. At every service we remember our loved ones. Some Jews will not speak the Kaddish and keep no year of mourning and remember no anniversary days. They lose the finer feelings and sentiments of life. Others, with all their rationalism are held fast in the bonds of superstition. Death and suffering and sorrow still seem to be supernatural judgment and vengeance from on high. We Jews fear no torments of the doomed. The terrors of death do not affright us. Our duty is to live and not, in fear of death, die a thousand deaths. Through life, we learn how to die, through death, we learn how to live.

Thousands think not what life is, care not how they live, so that they live. No thought ennobles and no purpose uplifts the life of thousands. Their one fear is lest they die too soon; therefore, eat, drink and be merry. Unworthy is this conception of life. Here is no consciousness of what life really is. To get rich is the all-consuming passion of our generation. Riches and power pass at last, then follow dissatisfaction and discontent. Our very pleasures satiate and disgust, at last, then life seems disappointment. Life is appointment, not disappointment. Not disappointment but appointment is life's noblest interpretation.

Life is service. 'Tis a new thought - 'tis a very old thought. Life is service - service to man - service to God - service to God by service to man.

Man is made in the image of God. Ours is not the pagan thought that man is creature of the caprice of the gods. Ours is not the Christian thought, that man is lost in sin to be saved only by the atoning blood. Judaism proclaims, and true Christianity also that man is child of God. Man is divine and his life is divine. Labor is not the curse of God. The pains and burdens of earth and death are not the punishment of God because of the sin of Adam. Life is God-appointment, somehow to accomplish a fulfillment of a divine purpose. Life is noble and not ignoble; privilege and not burden; - not curse, but blessing; not chance nor fate, but purpose. Life and death born - not of Satan, but of God.