The aim of this class is to explore the ways in which Jewish texts and thinkers have understood the experience of the soul after death across the ages. We will begin with a range of approaches taken to the afterlife in civilizations around the Ancient Near East, and then turn to Jewish thought as it evolved over time starting with the Biblical text and ending in the modern world. We will cover debates concerning truths about which the stakes could not be higher and survey some of the most compelling and imaginative pieces of Jewish literature ever produced, correcting popular misconceptions and shedding light on areas rarely discussed.

Required Texts

For this course there are no material’s that you’ll be required to purchase—all readings will be made available on canvas or are available online and will be linked or indicated on the canvas page.

Attendance and Participation

This class will be heavily focused on our in-class sessions and it is vital that you both attend and participate. Poor attendance (or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade noticeably.

Due Dates

Assignments must be turned in on the date and hour they are due unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate needing an extension, please let me know well before the due date. Readings listed above a particular date are to be read for that date.

Please be aware of the University’s Academic Integrity Statement as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

- Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, rkolm1@yu.edu during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.
- Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. She is available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 6pm. To make an appointment, go to yu2.nyuconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation – 20%
Midterm – 35%
Final Exam/Project – 45%
Week 1: Introduction
Readings: N/A
  **September 1**ª: “Why we don’t talk about the World to Come?”

Week 2: The Ancient World—Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia
  **September 8**ª: Neutral and Moral Immortality

Week 3: The Biblical Text I—**Prohibitions**
Readings: Hebrew Bible (*Selections*)
  **September 15**ª: Prohibitive Implications

Week 4: The Biblical Text II—**Intimations**
Readings: Hebrew Bible (*Selections*)
  **September 22**ª: Hints of Heaven and Hell

Weeks 5-6: Sukkot

Week 7: The Apocryphal Imagination—**A Break from the Hebrew Bible**
Readings: Maccabees 2 & 4 (*Selections*); Enoch 1 (*Selections*)
  **October 13**ª: The Journeys Begin

Week 8: The Rabbinic Sages I—**The Ins and Outs**
Readings: Mishnah (*Selections*)
  **October 20**ª: Holding the Line

Week 9: ***MIDTERM***
Readings: N/A
  **October 27**ª: In-class Midterm

Week 10: The Rabbinic Sages II—**Death’s Door & More**
Readings: Talmud (*Selections*)
  **November 3**ª: Facing New Fears

Week 11: The Middle Ages I—**Visionary Midrash**
Readings: *Gedulat Moshe* (*Selections*)
  **November 10**ª: An Explosion of Images

Week 12: The Middle Ages II—**Philosophers and Poets**
Readings: Judah HaLevi, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Immanuel of Rome (*Selections*)
  **November 17**ª: A New Language

Week 13: N/A
Readings: N/A
  **November 24**ª: Friday Schedule

Week 14: The Middle Ages III—**Pietists and Mystics**
Readings: Judah the Pious (*Selections*); *Zohar* (*Selections*)
  **December 1**ª: Ghosts and the Anatomy of Eternity

Week 15: Bridge to Modernity—**The Popular Imagination**
Readings: Chasidic Tales (*Selections*)
  **December 8**ª: Scenes of Feeling

Weeks 16: Where We Stand Today
Readings: Samson Raphael Hirsch, Joseph Soloveitchik, Jonathan Sacks (*Selections*)
  **December 15**ª: Back to the Beginning