

# "THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL"

by Jon Erlbaum

- This Week's **RRR** (Relevant Religious Reference): **"You are children to Hashem your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves... for a person who has passed away" - Deuteronomy 14:1**
- This Week's **SSC** (Suitable Secular Citation): **"I know there will be no more tears in heaven."** - Eric Clapton, *Tears in Heaven*

## MAY "HAMAKOM" CONSOLE YOU

Without question, the death of a loved one brings a crushing blow to the hearts of those that are left behind. When someone we love is no longer with us, the connection we shared is often replaced by a gaping, gut-wrenching void that can seemingly never be filled. In ancient times, pagan mourners even expressed their grief through various forms of self-mutilation. While Jewish wisdom is keenly sensitive and realistic regarding the intense emotions that arise in the throes of personal tragedy, why does our Torah verse (in the **RRR** above) prohibit self-mutilation as a response that is inappropriately extreme?

The answer seems to lie in the **language we use to refer to G-d in comforting a mourner during the shiva period**: *"May **HAMAKOM (THE PLACE)** console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem!"* Of all words that we might have chosen to refer to our Creator (e.g. the Compassionate One, the Holy One, etc.), why do we select the word *HaMakom* - the Place, or the Omnipresent - in the context of comforting a mourner?

## "THE PALACE" WITHIN "THE PLACE"

One reason is that this particular title, *"The Place"*, reassures the mourner that all of us - those living in the "here" and those living in the "hereafter" - are existing in the very same overall *Place*, under the shelter of G-d's all-encompassing Umbrella. This term lets us know **that while the dearly departed soul has moved on to another room within the "proverbial Palace", he or she has not moved far, and therefore the mourner can confidently look forward to being reunited with that soul when the appointed time will arrive.[1]**

## REUNION OF SOULS

In this light, we can see why a mourner's decision to inflict self-damage is deemed an excessive response: this act reveals the hopeless assumption that death does not represent a human soul's transition, but rather a chillingly final end to that being's existence. In stark contrast, calling our Creator "The Place" teaches us that while it is certainly natural and appropriate to cry, grieve, and experience a wide array of emotions over the temporary loss of a tangible relationship, we can take solace in the assurance that this loss is indeed temporary.[2] May we all be comforted by the realization that we will one day be reunited with our loved ones - with those whose souls have been on a journey, relocated to another destination nearby![3]

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra

*1. NOTE: This email does not tackle the obvious question of why we should have confidence in the veracity of the above ideas, since the treatment of that topic requires far more than a brief weekly blast allows for. Here is one approach, in the broadest of brush strokes (adapted from the teachings of Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb):*

- Let's assume that a system of belief - e.g. Judaism - espouses two types of ideas:  
A) Ideas that CAN be verified or falsified through empirical research, and B) Other ideas that CANNOT be verified or falsified through empirical research (for example, the existence of a Soul or an Afterlife).
- If sufficient evidence is found that corroborates the unique positive claims of those ideas that CAN be investigated (i.e. "A" above), then depending on other factors, it may be reasonable to extrapolate credibility to the un-researchable claims espoused by that same system (i.e. "B" above). Again, this discussion requires much elaboration. For the meantime, I hope that you have found the ideas above to be uplifting. 2. From the Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, aka Nachmanides) and the Stone Chumash (Artscroll), page 10113. The main insights in this week's article are adapted from a recorded lecture by Rabbi Dr. Akiva Tatz. **RECOMMENDATION:** for those who have experienced a loss, I highly recommend the meaningful book **REMEMBER MY SOUL (CLICK ON TITLE) by Lori Palatnik.**

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