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PERCEPTIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE BETWEEN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION AND JUDAISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONCEPTS OF DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND IMMORTALITY

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to understand the perceptions of the afterlife in ancient Egyptian and Jewish religions. Ancient Egyptians believed in an eternal life after death, with funerary rituals designed to assist the deceased in their journey. In contrast, Judaism presents different concepts focusing on resurrection and retribution, derived from Biblical tradition, with further later developments in their views about the unseen and eternal life. The study discusses similarities between the two religions, as well as fundamental differences, and points to possible influences between them. It also focuses on the role these beliefs played in shaping the religious, cultural, and social identity of both communities and in the development of their understanding of death and immortality. The study concludes that, despite each religion's distinct beliefs, there was historical and cultural interaction that contributed to shaping some perceptions about the afterlife.

KEYWORDS

The Afterlife, Egyptian Religion, Judaism, Death

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Introduction

Perceptions of the afterlife, encompassing the concepts of death, resurrection, and immortality, offer a rich domain for comparative research between ancient religions and Abrahamic faiths. This significance stems from the profound implications these perceptions hold for beliefs, myths, and rituals, alongside their influence on the intellectual and moral structures of societies. In ancient Egypt, foundational religious tenets regarding resurrection, the afterlife, and immortality were firmly established, reflecting directly on funerary practices and thought. Conversely, within Judaism, concepts of resurrection and immortality evolved gradually, influenced by the historical contexts of ancient Egyptian civilization and the broader cultures of the Near East.

Based on the aforementioned premises, the primary research problem of this study revolves around the following central question: *To what extent can it be argued that a cultural link or influence exists between ancient Egyptian and Jewish perceptions of the afterlife?*

From this primary question, several sub-questions emerge:

1. How did each religion interpret the concepts of death, resurrection, and immortality?
2. What are the key points of similarity and divergence between the conceptualizations of death, resurrection, and immortality in both faiths?
3. How did these concepts reflect on funerary rituals and moral ideals?

To address these inquiries, this study sets forth the following hypotheses:

- The interpretation of death, resurrection, and immortality in each religion reflects the specific cultural and religious environment unique to that faith.
- Shared elements within these perceptions exist due to a closely situated cultural and geographical environment in the ancient Near East.
- The variations between the two doctrines stem from differences in their foundational religious structures and the distinct influence of their respective sacred texts and laws.
- The evolution of these concepts may reflect the changing spiritual and social needs of the individual.

This research aims to examine and analyze the concepts of death, resurrection, and immortality in ancient Egyptian religion and Judaism to comprehend how these ideas influenced broader beliefs, rituals, and dogmas, thereby enhancing scholarly knowledge of the philosophical and cultural links between both civilizations regarding the afterlife.

Methodologically, this study relies on a descriptive-analytical approach to provide detailed examination and critique, supplemented by a comparative approach to highlight the distinct analytical divergences between the frameworks of ancient Egyptian religion and Judaism.

Ultimately, understanding the concepts of death, resurrection, and immortality directly dictates how individuals navigate mortal existence and cultivate a sense of moral responsibility toward others. This understanding mitigates the existential fear of death, offers a hope for permanence, and ultimately fosters a cohesive and stable society by reinforcing a commitment to shared values and principles.

1. Perceptions of the Afterlife in Ancient Egyptian Religion

1.1. Historical Evolution of Ancient Egyptian Beliefs

The primitive belief held by ancient Egyptians and contemporary Mesopotamian peoples regarding post-mortem destiny was that "the dead reside in an underworld filled with darkness, a domain shared by all individuals, righteous and wicked alike" (Al-Qamni, 2020, p. 119). Scholars and ancient texts did not completely agree on the exact location of this realm, which they referred to as the "*Duat*" (Budge, 1998, p. 199).

The ancient Egyptian believed that the spirits of deities traversed various realms and that gods, despite their immense power, suffered death much like humans. The human being was understood to comprise a physical body, a soul, and a divine essence known as the "*Ka*". This essence persists after death in a manner akin to the gods, capable of returning to the physical vessel provided the body maintains its structural integrity. Consequently, mummification was employed to preserve the physical form so that the *Ka* might return to it (Al-Esh & Al-Zuhayli, 2020–2021, p. 47). Death to the ancient Egyptian was thus the threshold of immortality; they acknowledged its inevitability and accepted it without deeply interrogating its biological causes (Al-Husseini, 2012, p. 235).

According to Egyptian thought, death was viewed merely as a temporary transition phase toward achieving eternal life, wherein the soul reunites with the body to live indefinitely; death functioned as a gateway dividing the mortal world from the hereafter (Lamia, 2018, p. 386). Archaeological evidence heavily substantiates the existence of post-mortem doctrines among ancient Egyptians, as tombs routinely contained food and tools, signaling a firm belief in an ongoing existence beyond death.

Furthermore, the practice of body preservation consolidated the concept of life's continuity after death (Černý, 1996, p. 106). This is corroborated by the *Pyramid Texts*, which declare that the soul is immortal and never perishes. Similarly, the sarcophagus of "*Aba-Ankhu*" bears the inscription: "Aba-Ankhu, arise, arise, live and be strong," while Chapter 44 of the *Book of the Dead* explicitly states the deceased's proclamation: "I shall not die a second time in the underworld" (Zikri, 1923, p. 101).

The Realm of the Dead

Ancient Egyptian civilization explicitly addressed the realm of the deceased alongside concepts of divine reward and retribution. Egyptians maintained a belief in a day of judgment where a deity evaluated human earthly deeds and the purity of the heart. This theological structure incentivized individuals to adhere to moral virtues and avoid malice. The god *Set* emerged as the archetype of Satan and evil, symbolized variously by a donkey, a serpent, a pig, or a crocodile; he reigned as the master of chaos and subversion, representing one of the earliest primitive depictions of the devil in religious history (Al-Smadi, 2005, p. 52). Notably, Akhenaten's Atenist doctrine did not emphasize the underworld with the same intensity found in alternative Egyptian theological frameworks (Al-Smadi, 2005, p. 52).

The intense ancient Egyptian focus on post-mortem doctrines can be attributed to two main categories of reasons:

1. Objective Reasons: The physical environment and soil of Egypt naturally aided the preservation of human remains. Additionally, the predictable and regular flooding of the Nile inspired ideas of a cyclical, renewing life force each year, with the sun serving as the epicenter of Egyptian religious experience.

2. Subjective Reasons: Death was conceptualized as a standard boundary between two continuous worlds: the earthly life and the hereafter. Religious thought unified deities, the living, and the dead into a singular, interconnected cosmic community (Al-Majidi, 1999, p. 191).

The Afterlife in the Doctrine of Resurrection and Immortality

• **Origin of the Concepts:** The notions of death and resurrection into the afterlife crystallized over millennia, derived directly from natural phenomena that mirrored patterns of disappearance and rejuvenation. Sarcophagus texts tied the Nile's inundation to the resurrection and manifestation of the god *Osiris*, whereas seasonal drought symbolized his death. Consequently, the epithet "*Osiris*" was universally applied to the deceased to symbolize alignment with the resurrection journey of the deity. Furthermore, resurrection and immortality were intimately linked to the daily solar transit; sunset denoted human death, while sunrise represented resurrection. This understanding was bound to the sun god *Ra*, who guided the righteous through the kingdom of the dead (Khalil, 2022, p. 87). These doctrines originated early in Egypt's history, potentially tracing back to the Paleolithic era and reaching maturity during the Neolithic era through regional burial customs (Al-Majidi, 1999, p. 192).

• **The Concept of Immortality:** Emerging during the Stone Ages alongside cognitive development, immortality beliefs became pronounced toward the late Neolithic period. Infants buried at Naqada near Thebes were interred as symbols of rebirth into new worlds following death (Al-Saqqaf, 2004, p. 30). In this context, the Greek historian Herodotus remarked that "the Egyptians were the first people to maintain the immortality of the soul" (Abdul-Bari, 2004, p. 23).

• **The Osirian Model of Immortality:** The Osirian school conceptualized the human being via a living spiritual principle, viewing the individual as an autonomous entity. The soul was divided into components such as the "*Ka*", which mirrored the physical person, and the "*Ba*", often depicted on Abydos tombs in the form of a bird (Al-Saqqaf, 2004, p. 32).

• **Rituals of Resurrection and Immortality:** Prior to interring the mummy and placing offerings inside the tomb, rituals commenced with a solemn ceremonial funeral procession. This included a symbolic pilgrimage to Abydos, crossing the Nile westward toward the necropolis and arriving at the tomb. This journey allowed the deceased to participate in the mystical rites and gifts performed in honor of Osiris at Abydos, serving as an indispensable component of the burial tradition.

Wall inscriptions and the *Book of the Dead* indicate that once the sarcophagus—containing the viscera, ritual tools, funerary furniture, and offerings—reached the necropolis, the "Opening of the Mouth" ritual was conducted. A purified priest acted on behalf of the deceased's eldest son to symbolically reanimate the mummy. The core objective of these complex funerary rituals was to guarantee a functional new life in the afterlife (Al-Siddiq, 2006, p. 22).

1.2. Core Concepts in Ancient Egyptian Thought

Structure of the Soul and Personal Components

In ancient Egyptian belief, the soul comprised multiple distinct elements, ranging from five to nine components depending on the specific theological era:

• **The *Ba* (Bai):** This component represents the soul's ability to manifest in various forms, not exclusively confined to an avian shape. Egyptologists translate it as either "the external manifestation" or "the soul," with its plural form, "*Baw*", denoting the complete repository of forms an individual can inhabit, signifying "capacity" or "power."

• **The *Akh* (Ikh):** Frequently translated as "spirit" or "the radiant soul," where "radiant" reflects the original etymological meaning linked to a bird's vibrant plumage. The *Ba* bird remained a favored emblem for the spirit, typically depicted with a human head. However, by the Middle Kingdom, the terminology shifted from the radiant "*Akh-bird*" toward notions closer to a "genie" or a "phantom," a term later preserved in the Coptic language (Černý, 1996, p. 109).

• **The *Ka*:** Consisting of an intangible substance, the *Ka* was an exact double of the person, replicating their physical form whether man, woman, or child. Created and born concurrently with the physical body, it accompanied the individual through earthly life, inhabited the tomb post-mortem, escorted the soul to the tribunal of Osiris, and ultimately entered paradise to attain divine status (Zikri, 1923, p. 103). In antiquities, the *Ka* is explicitly inscribed in the tomb of *Rekhmire* as "may your second body stand behind you," and similarly in the tomb of *Taho*: "The second body of the deceased, his soul, his shadow, and his corpse are all pure" (Zikri, 1923, p. 105).

Mummification and Body Preservation

Resurrection necessitated strict ritual procedures to secure the physical conditions essential for ensuring an afterlife. Preserving the physical body via mummification was vital, replicating the mythological process undergone by Osiris. This involved eviscerating the organs and placing them into four distinct alabaster (canopic) jars, separating and treating the bodily limbs with mineral salts, packing the torso with resinous and aromatic materials, restoring the physical form using straw or linen padding, and wrapping the body securely in linen bandages. This task was executed strictly by specialized priests (Croizet, 1986, p. 107).

Egyptian texts explicitly acknowledged that "the body belongs to the earth and the soul belongs to the heavens," addressing their Pharaoh: "Though your body may decay far and wide, your soul shall endure and witness Ra in his crimson yields" (alluding to the sun in its red horizons). Consequently, they prioritized tombs, designating them as "houses of eternity" (Al-Himyari, 2006).

In this regard, Egyptologist Jan Assmann notes that Simon Gail lauded the ancient Egyptian doctrine of immortality, asserting that the Egyptians successfully established an enduring conceptualization of immortality by constructing sacred stone monuments like pyramids, which immortalized the memory of both deities and the deceased (Assmann, 2011, p. 44). Their meticulous care for the physical body stemmed from the conviction that the soul would return to its physical vessel; earthly residences were treated as temporary lodgings, whereas the tomb was considered the permanent, eternal dwelling. Architecture was thus bisected into two main domains:

1. Temples dedicated exclusively to the worship of deities.
2. Pyramids containing the tombs of early pharaohs (Al-Mousawi, 2013, p. 31).

The Eschatological Judgment Process

Ancient Egyptians developed the concept of a post-mortem trial prior to entering paradise. Initially presided over by the sun god *Ra*, leadership of the tribunal was later assumed by *Osiris*. The deity supervised the weighing of the heart, which was placed on one side of a scale, balanced against the feather of *Ma'at* (truth and justice) on the opposite side. If an individual's righteous deeds outweighed their transgressions, their sins were erased, granting them entry into the divine assembly: "Your sins shall be wiped away, and your faults forgiven before the scales on the day of reckoning, and you shall be numbered among those aboard the bark of Ra."

Reflecting this ethical framework, the sage *Kheti* advised his son *Merikare* to adhere firmly to justice and virtue: "...Do not trust in the length of years, for they view a long lifetime as but a single hour. A man remains after death, and his deeds are placed beside him... Existence there is everlasting... and he who reaches it without committing evil shall live there like a god, moving freely alongside the lords of eternity" (Amhaz, 2010, p. 182).

2. Perceptions of the Afterlife in the Jewish Religion

2.1. The Jewish Concept of Death and its Doctrinal Impact

The word "death" corresponds to the Hebrew word "*Maveth*", which historically aligns with the name of the god of death in ancient Canaanite worship. In Canaanite mythology, Maveth clashed continuously with *Baal*, the god of rain and fertility; Baal would return during the rainy months and perish at their conclusion, allowing Maveth to return to life when the rains ceased. Within the Old Testament, traces of this emerge through a dualistic framing where death is sometimes treated as a force operating independently with its own emissaries, as noted in the Book of Hosea: "*I will deliver them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? Repentance shall be hidden from my eyes*" (Hosea 13:14).

The Old Testament offers two primary theological explanations for the origin of death:

1. **The Material Creation:** Man was formed from the dust of the ground and must inevitably return to it. As stated in Genesis: *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"* (Genesis 2:7), and corroborated in the Book of Job: *"Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?"* (Job 10:9).

2. **Punishment for Sin:** Death serves as a direct penalty for transgression, stemming from the original sin of Adam, which caused his expulsion from the Garden of Eden and deprived humanity of access to the Tree of Life. As recorded in Genesis: *"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life"* (Genesis 3:22–24). Accordingly, within this theological framework, final death is a penalty that God lifts from humanity in the world to come (the afterlife) (Al-Messiri, 1999, pp. 434–435).

2.2. The Concept of Resurrection in Judaism

Resurrection corresponds to the Hebrew phrase *"Techiyat HaMetim"*. Broadly, scholars categorize the understanding of resurrection into two conceptual frameworks:

- **The Monotheistic Framework:** Belief in resurrection denotes the literal return of the soul to the physical body on the Day of Judgment to face divine reward or punishment.

- **The Immanent/Pantheistic Framework:** Within this scope, resurrection takes alternative forms, such as belief in the transmigration of souls (metempsychosis), the immortality of the soul separate from bodily resurrection, or the belief that the dead reside eternally in an independent underworld.

Crucially, the earliest books of the Old Testament contain no explicit references to the literal resurrection of the dead or an individual eternal afterlife; early Hebrews believed that man effectively perishes at death. Even when the idea of an immortal soul emerged, it was not initially linked to resurrection, ethical judgment, or divine retribution. Instead, the soul post-mortem descended to a murky, shadow-filled underworld known as *"Sheol"*, where it remained indefinitely regardless of earthly conduct. This is illustrated in the Book of Job: *"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave [Sheol] shall come up no more"* (Job 7:9) (Al-Messiri, 1999, p. 430).

2.3. Historical Phases of Resurrection and the Afterlife in Judaism

The development of resurrection and eschatological thought in Judaism progressed through three historical phases, coinciding with the geopolitical trajectory of the Israelites following their Exodus from Egypt, heavily influenced by neighboring religions and regional cultures:

Phase I: Omission of the Afterlife

Early Judaism largely bypassed discussions of an afterlife doctrine. Anyone reading the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses) will find it completely devoid of clear depictions of this doctrine. In this regard, Dr. Hassan Zaza cites a French researcher stating: *"The Day of the Lord, in the sense intended by the prophets, was a subject of mockery for many who viewed it as incredibly remote, labeling this distant horizon with the Hebrew term 'Acherit HaYamim' (the end of days or the hereafter)—a day about which the Torah mentioned nothing during the eras of Moses or the Judges."*

This is supported by Ibn Kammuna's classical text *Tanqih al-Abhath lil-Milal al-Thalath (Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths)*: *"We find no explicit declaration of otherworldly reward and punishment within this Torah, despite it being an essential topic and a paramount pillar of legislation. Had the Torah in the hands of the Jews been preserved precisely as revealed by God, it would not be devoid of explicit declarations on this matter, nor would it substitute them entirely with earthly rewards and punishments, which are mentioned profusely. For the mortal world is fleeting, and its pleasures or miseries are of little consequence compared to eternity"* (Abdul-Bari, 2004, p. 152).

Phase II: Regional Near Eastern Integration

During their settlement in Palestine, the Israelites encountered eastern religious systems, leading to a clearer conceptualization of the underworld that closely mirrored Sumerian and Babylonian frameworks. During this period, Hebrew eschatological thought adopted the structures of Mesopotamian civilizations, though ideas of immortality and the afterlife remained highly ambiguous. The Sumerians and Babylonians characterized the underworld as a dismal domain of darkness and gloom from which no traveler could ever

escape. Consequently, Biblical texts from this phase lack any clear formulation of resurrection, presenting narratives that lean toward myth and folklore rather than structured dogma (Al-Khatib, 2008, pp. 171–174).

Phase III: Post-Exilic Evolution

This phase occurred following the Babylonian Captivity, accelerated by the Persian conquest of Babylon. This geopolitical shift brought Jews into direct contact with Zoroastrianism, a religion that placed immense emphasis on a final judgment, heaven, hell, and cosmic resurrection (Al-Khatib, 2008, pp. 171–174).

2.4. Scholarly Explanations for the Torah's Omission of the Afterlife

Researchers offer several explanations for why the early Torah omits direct references to the afterlife:

- The ancient Israelites were already well-acquainted with the doctrine from their time in Egypt, making repetitive emphasis unnecessary—a position explicitly supported by the Jewish scholar Ibn Kammuna.
 - Otherworldly retribution can be deduced logically through human reason; thus, the text abbreviated discussions of the afterlife, relying on the intellect to infer it.
 - Prophetic revelations naturally prioritize immediate, proximal historical events due to pressing societal needs, while compressing depictions of remote future events—a view championed by Saadia Gaon.
- Conversely, other scholars attribute the lack of emphasis on the afterlife to sociocultural factors:
- A localized focus on secular dominance over rival tribes.
 - An intense preoccupation with immediate material and worldly affairs.
 - A theological outlook that concentrated entirely on collective, historical deliverance from earthly persecution (Isa, 2012, p. 246).

2.5. Early Indicators and Allusions to Resurrection

Despite the general omission, foundational seeds of resurrection thought were present early on, embedded within attributes depicting God as the ultimate arbiter of life who could revive the dead, as demonstrated by the bodily ascension of Elijah. This is observed in the Book of Isaiah: *"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead"* (Isaiah 26:19).

Similarly, the Book of Daniel states: *"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book"* (Daniel 12:1).

Following the formal emergence of the concept, subsequent Old Testament commentators attempted to retroactively project resurrection theology onto earlier texts. For example, Rashi interpreted Psalm 15:17 as an allusion to resurrection. Nevertheless, the concept remained highly contested within Judaism; even after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sadducees resolutely denied the resurrection of the body, and historical evidence suggests the Essenes likewise rejected bodily resurrection, contrasting sharply with the Pharisees (Al-Messiri, 1999, p. 273).

2.6. Prophetic Allusions: National Rebirth vs. Eschatological Resurrection

Exegesis of prophetic references to resurrection splits scholars into two camps:

1. The National-Political View: Commentators argue that these references are strictly allegorical, denoting the national revival of the Jewish people and the restoration of their sovereign state. For instance, Nashid Hanna posits in his commentary that "bringing life out of death is a metaphor for a national awakening and a spiritual return that secures the forgiveness of sins."

2. The Literal Eschatological View: Other scholars assert these texts describe a literal end-times resurrection, noting that post-exilic Jews absorbed these concepts via prolonged exposure to Persian and Babylonian theology.

Under the literal interpretation, the resurrection of the dead is bisected into two manifestations:

- The righteous who rise to experience eternal life.
- The wicked who are raised to face condemnation and judgment. The prophetic command to "awake" indicates that those sleeping as dust and bones within the earth will inevitably be reanimated, causing the earth to "cast out the dead" (Abdul-Bari, 2004, p. 163).

2.7. Development of Resurrection in Rabbinic and Later Texts

Rabbinic Judaism solidified belief in the resurrection of the dead (*Techiyat HaMetim*) as an foundational, indispensable article of faith, asserting it entails the reunification of the soul and the body. However, its institutionalization introduced complex theological dilemmas regarding its timeline, splitting eschatological thought into two elements: a linear, historical timeline (the Messianic Age) and an extra-historical, timeless dimension (the End of Days).

The precise relationship linking resurrection to Judgment Day, Gehenna (hell), and Gan Eden (paradise) remained fluid and retained substantial immanentist elements, often remaining bound to national narratives of physical return to the Promised Land. Furthermore, internal disputes persisted regarding *who* would be resurrected: Maimonides asserted that resurrection is a privilege reserved exclusively for the righteous, whereas an alternative school maintained that the entirety of the human race would be resurrected at the end of days.

Even in contemporary thought, certain Jewish movements reject bodily resurrection; Reform Judaism denies the literal return of the soul to a physical body for judgment, emphasizing instead the pure immortality of the soul (Al-Messiri, 1999, p. 274).

The Day of Judgment

Rare allusions to a final "Day of Judgment" in the Old Testament are interpreted through two prisms:

- **Literal Eschatological Resurrection:** The actual physical return of humanity after death for accountability and retribution. Saadia Gaon stated: "The revival of the dead, which our Lord informed us will occur in the afterlife for retribution, is a matter of absolute consensus across our nation... because the ultimate purpose of all creation is man, honored with the duty of obedience, the fruit of which is life in the realm of reward."

- **National Metaphor:** The geopolitical restoration of the Jewish nation on earth.

Sects like the Sadducees and modern Reform factions reject literal physical resurrection. The New Testament highlights this sectarian divide during an exchange where a disciple asks Jesus if the physical body enters paradise: "Beware, Peter, of becoming like the Sadducees, for the Sadducees claim the body does not rise, and that there are no angels; therefore, their bodies and souls are barred from entering paradise." This theological rift is confirmed in the Acts of the Apostles: "*For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both*" (Acts 23:8).

Despite historical sectarian disputes, the majority of Jewish denominations eventually integrated resurrection into their core tenets. This consensus led Islamic scholar Imam Al-Shawkani to observe: "The People of the Book in our contemporary era affirm the resurrection, paradise, hellfire, reckoning, punishment, and reward; none among them deny it, nor do any dissenters oppose it" (Isa, 2012, p. 246).

3. Cross-Cultural Interactions and Mutual Influences

3.1. Afterlife Beliefs and Funerary Practices

Ancient Egyptian religion was renowned for its highly developed, systematized doctrines regarding the afterlife, including the weighing of the heart, the eternal destination in the Field of Reeds (Aaru), and the paramount importance of preserving the physical corpse. While early Judaism did not place an equivalent emphasis on the post-mortem fate during its formative phases, later Jewish literature—particularly during the Second Temple period—displays an escalating preoccupation with eschatology and the resurrection of the dead. The conceptualization of a final judgment and the resurrection of the righteous was partially informed by existing Egyptian frameworks regarding the afterlife, even as Judaism forged its own distinct eschatological trajectory within the broader cultural melting pot of the ancient Near East (Musacchio, 2025).

3.2. Resurrection and Reanimation Mechanics

Resurrection served as the structural linchpin of Egyptian theological thought, which viewed life as leading inexorably to death, and death as leading back to life. This cyclical loop was re-enacted daily as the sun god Ra traversed the underworld in his solar bark; his radiant light pierced the darkness of the dead, causing them to awaken from their slumber. For the righteous, existence in the afterlife unfolded across fertile celestial fields (paradise), whereas sinners were condemned to fall into the crushing depths of the earth (Hornung, 1996, p. 13).

In evaluating the Jewish perspective, Dr. Abdel-Majid Hammo notes: "I searched extensively throughout the early Torah for mention of the afterlife, yet I found absolutely no trace of it. When an individual died who enjoyed the favor of the biblical scribes, they wrote: '*and he slept with his fathers in peace.*' Conversely, if they disdained him, they wrote: '*and his gray hairs went down to the grave [Sheol].*' The early

Jewish Torah and Talmud lack a structured depiction of an otherworldly life, a day of resurrection, or a day of final accounting; early Jewish thought leaned heavily toward material reality over abstract spiritualism" (Yacoub, 2023).

3.3. Ethical Judgments and Divine Justice

In the Egyptian model, the deceased faced an intensive tribunal overseen by Osiris and forty-two divine judges, requiring the recitation of the "Forty-Two Negative Confessions." The deceased would supplicate: "O my heart, rise not up as a witness against me, nor tilt the scales against me before the master of the balance." If the scales balanced perfectly, it proved the deceased had lived in total alignment with *Ma'at* (cosmic justice), securing absolution. If the scales tipped heavily with sin, the heart was instantly devoured by a monstrous beast named *Ammut* (The Devourer) (Haneesh et al., 2018, p. 18).

This ethical framework aligns closely with the subsequent evolutionary trajectory of Jewish thought, which increasingly prioritized divine retribution, accountability, and a system of reward and punishment anchored strictly to divine absolute justice, ensuring punishment fits the transgression and reward matches righteousness (Al-Imam, 2012, p. 22).

Conclusions

A comparative analysis of afterlife perceptions in ancient Egyptian religion and Judaism reveals vital intersections, most notably a shared human impulse to comprehend post-mortem destiny through concepts of life after death, resurrection, and divine judgment. Nevertheless, deep structural divergences separate the two religious systems:

Summary of Similarities

- Both systems affirm that physical death is not the absolute end of existence, but rather a transition into an alternative state of being.
- Both frameworks assert that humans face accountability after death for actions committed during earthly life.
- Both doctrines maintain that an individual's deeds must be righteous to safely navigate eschatological trials and divine scrutiny.

Summary of Differences

Feature	Ancient Egyptian Religion	Judaism
Sources of Eschatological Knowledge	Relies on complex funerary texts, magical incantations, and mythological literature (e.g., <i>The Book of the Dead</i>).	Grounded in sacred scriptures (The Old Testament/Tanakh) and rabbinic commentary, evolving progressively across historical eras.
Nature of the Afterlife Realm	Conceived as a tangible, quasi-physical paradise known as the "Fields of Aaru."	Conceived primarily as a spiritual domain encompassing heaven, hell, or the historical shadow-realm of <i>Sheol</i> .
Arbiter of Judgment	Presided over by the god Osiris accompanied by forty-two divine assessors.	God (Yahweh) acts as the sole judge of humanity.
Status of the Physical Body	Physical preservation via mummification is mandatory to ensure the return of the soul.	Physical preservation is not a theological prerequisite; the primary emphasis rests on the soul.
Mechanisms of Salvation	Contingent upon funerary rituals, magical amulets, mummification, and cultic recitations.	Contingent upon faith, repentance, and strict adherence to divine commandments and covenants.
Doctrinal Evolution	Maintained a relatively stable, uniform structure across millennia.	Developed dynamically, shifting from early concepts of an undifferentiated <i>Sheol</i> to a fully formed system of resurrection, heaven, and hell.

Future Research Recommendations

1. Conduct deep semantic and symbolic investigations into the roles played by sacred archetypes—such as the god Osiris in ancient Egypt—in guiding the soul through the underworld, contrasting these with models of monotheistic divine judgment in Judaism.

Analyze the social dimensions and funerary expenditures in both civilizations, evaluating how these afterlife doctrines shaped daily socioeconomic realities, specifically comparing Egypt's monumental body preservation infrastructure with traditional Jewish burial customs.

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