

Introduction to the Afterlife

Welcome to our unit study on the Afterlife

Though this is intended for a Pagan audience, mainstream religions have been included just to make it more complete. It makes for more interesting comparisons too.

The concepts of the Afterlife can be complicated and this unit has been simplified to keep it kid-friendly and to convey the basics without having to teach the entire religion (that's another study!). I apologize if I gloss over anything important or get anything incorrect with someone's path.

There is a page for each of 9 religions, along with a few extra pages of material to convey the various "rules" that each religion may have about where your soul ends up (lists of sins, commandments, virtues, etc.)

Also, there is a crossword puzzle to test how much detail has been remembered after reading through the unit, and a few other exercises to get thinking and exploring the various versions of the Afterlife. There is also a blank page with a border where you can draw your vision of one of these Afterlife worlds.

NORSE



There is a whole world in the Norse version of the afterlife, including a number of places, halls and characters.

Asgard is the land of the Gods, and each of the major deities has a hall there. Souls of the various honored dead go to the different

halls to spend eternity feasting, drinking and doing combat with their fellow fallen.

Those who die in battle have their souls collected by the Valkyries, and taken to Asgard where some go to Valhalla (Odin's hall) and some go to Folkvangr (Freya's hall).

What about those who die of old age, illness or accidents? Unfortunately, those souls go to Hel's realm of Helheim which is dark, cold and not that much fun.

It's not really a matter of how you *lived*, but more about how you *die* that determines where you end up in the afterlife. That doesn't mean that the Norse didn't have any moral guidelines though. The "nine noble virtues" are one example of how they saw honourable living.

NINE NOBLE VIRTUES

Courage

Truth

Honor

Fidelity

Discipline

Hospitality

Industriousness

Self-Reliance

Perseverance

∴FRHMRE·FY·THM·HRFXE†∴



CELTIC

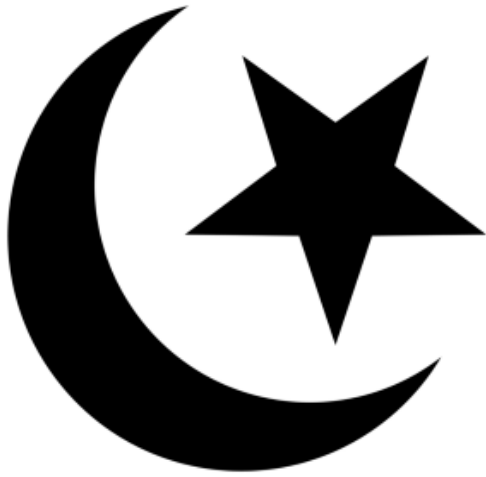
The Celts weren't just one people. This means the Irish, the Welsh, Gauls and the ancient British. So they didn't all believe exactly the same things about the afterlife.

They weren't exactly people who wrote things down a lot either. That means we don't know 100% what their ideas about the afterlife were.

Celts were usually buried with all kinds of important goods and wealth, and it's believed that they went to a fine land of the Otherworld after they died. The stuff they were buried with would be used when they arrived.

But some say that Celtic people also believed in reincarnation, though probably not as something that happened to everyone. Sometimes people were reborn to help the living, and sometimes other spirits (the fae, or Sidhe) came from the Otherworld.

Islam



In Islam, your soul doesn't head off to the Afterlife right after you die like most other religions believe. You wait patiently in your grave until the Day of Judgement when everyone will be sorted up between the rewards of Jannah and the fiery punishment of

Jahannam.

You go to heaven if you have performed enough good deeds in your lifetime. Non-muslims are destined for Jahannam no matter how they live, as are any Muslims who didn't live a good life. But the Muslims are not left there permanently. They can work their way up to Heaven after a period of suffering.

Jannah is your typical paradise, filled with delights with many descriptions of beautiful garden surroundings and delicious foods.

The holy book of Islam (the Quran) states there are 7 major sins, and about 70 lesser ones. These are the things you need to avoid though performing good actions can help counter-act the sins you do commit. Regardless of how you live your life, it's up to the judgement of Allah where in the Afterlife you end up.

Seven Major Sins

Associating anything with the worship of
Allah (God)

Practising magick

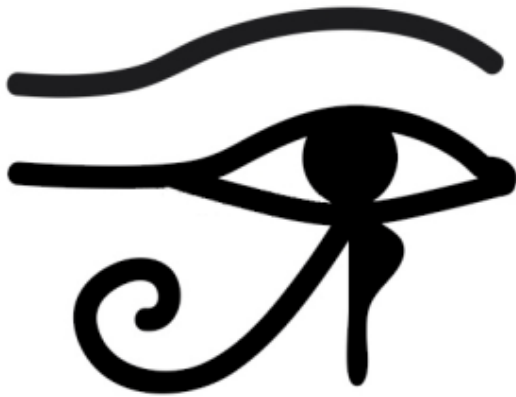
Collecting interest on loaned money

Killing without just cause

Dealing unfairly with the property of
an orphan

Running away from battle

Falsely accusing women of acting
immorally



Egyptian

I'm pretty sure that you already know how important the afterlife was to the ancient Egyptians. But still, let's talk about what they believed in a bit more detail.

Your body and belongings were all part of your life after death, which is why wealthy Pharaohs kept such huge tombs filled with wealth, weapons, furniture and even clothing. The same idea applied to the body, so it was preserved as a mummy. The heart would be left in place, so that Osiris could weigh it.

When you died, your heart would be weighed on a scale against the feather of Ma'at by the god Osiris. If your heart was pure and lighter than the feather, you get to go on to the afterlife. If not, it was tossed to Ammit and eaten.

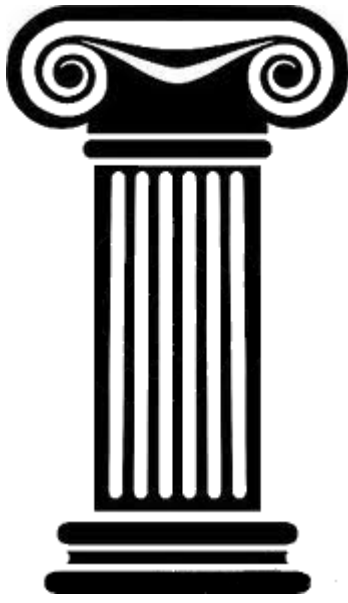
At this time, you were further judged with 42 "negative confessions" where you would have to declare 42 things you didn't do in life (like "I did not steal" or "I did not lie").

All of this takes place in the Duat, the land of the Dead but that is not the same thing as the Egyptian afterlife. Once you pass the tests, you simply would go on to the next life, it wasn't considered another place really. The Duat is also the place where the sun went after it set, but that's another story.

42 Negative Confessions

1. I have not committed sin.
2. I have not committed robbery with violence.
3. I have not stolen.
4. I have not slain men or women.
5. I have not stolen food.
6. I have not swindled offerings.
7. I have not stolen from God/Goddess.
8. I have not told lies.
9. I have not carried away food.
10. I have not cursed.
11. I have not closed my ears to truth.
12. I have not committed adultery.
13. I have not made anyone cry.
14. I have not felt sorrow without reason.
15. I have not assaulted anyone.
16. I am not deceitful.
17. I have not stolen anyone's land.
18. I have not been an eavesdropper.
19. I have not falsely accused anyone.
20. I have not been angry without reason.
21. I have not seduced anyone's wife.
22. I have not polluted myself.
23. I have not terrorized anyone.
24. I have not disobeyed the Law.
25. I have not been exclusively angry.
26. I have not cursed God/Goddess.
27. I have not behaved with violence.
28. I have not caused disruption of peace.
29. I have not acted hastily or without thought.
30. I have not overstepped my boundaries of concern.
31. I have not exaggerated my words when speaking.
32. I have not worked evil.
33. I have not used evil thoughts, words or deeds.
34. I have not polluted the water.
35. I have not spoken angrily or arrogantly.
36. I have not cursed anyone in thought, word or deeds.
37. I have not placed myself on a pedestal.
38. I have not stolen what belongs to God/Goddess.
39. I have not stolen from or disrespected the deceased.
40. I have not taken food from a child.
41. I have not acted with insolence.
42. I have not destroyed property belonging to God/Goddess





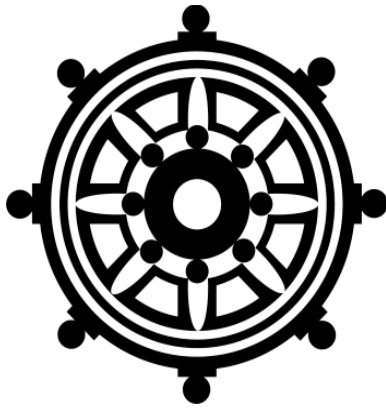
Greek

The ancient Greeks were another people who had a big landscape of places and characters in their afterlife world.

Several rivers run through the underworld, like the famous river Styx. The dead were buried with a coin, so they could pay Charon the ferryman to get across the river. Once on the other side, the main entrance was guarded by the great 3-headed dog, Cerberus.

From there, the *really* bad souls went to Tartarus for punishment, and the *really* good souls went to the Elysian Fields. Most people were somewhere in between, and just went to the Asphodel Meadows. The entire realm of the Underworld was ruled by Hades, brother to Zeus and Poseidon.

Life went on in the Underworld, pretty much like it did before you died. Other than the punishment of Tartarus, not much happened. Souls just sort of existed, without purpose or activity. The Greeks didn't believe in any eternal rewards after death. Your soul simply *was*. As long as you weren't facing punishment in Tartarus, that's all that mattered.



Buddhist & Hindu

Buddhism and Hinduism are two of the few faiths that doesn't believe in any sort of *place* in the Afterlife.

In both faiths, we are reincarnated after death to live another lifetime on this Earth. Each life is intended to bring us more lessons to grow, learn and gain more wisdom with each go around.

Our actions during our life will influence how our next life goes, and this is called Karma. We can gain either good or bad Karma, depending on the things we do.

For Buddhists, there isn't really punishment for doing bad things, just that we'll be given different lessons based on the things we still need to learn after our life is over. Hindus do feel that we can bring suffering on ourselves in the next life if we do bad things in this one.

Eventually, your soul is fully enlightened, and from there you are released from the cycle of reincarnation to join with the energy of the Universe. For Buddhists, this is Nirvana and the Hindus call it moksha.





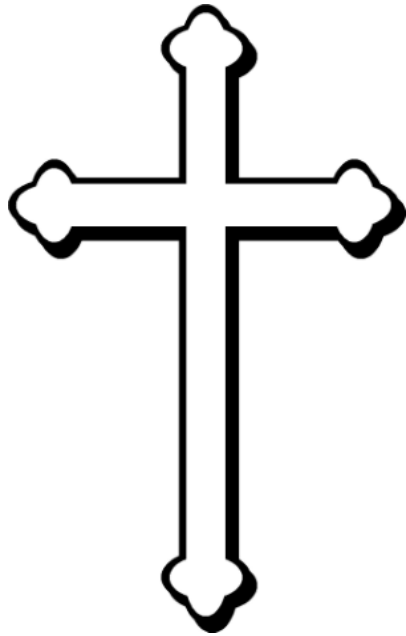
Wiccan

Wicca is the only religion in this unit that isn't really tied to any historic culture, and it doesn't have a set-in-stone set of beliefs of an Afterlife.

That means that not all Wiccans believe in the same thing. If you are following a Wiccan path but worship the Greek Gods, you might believe in the Greek version of the Afterlife for example.

A common Afterlife belief across many variations of Wicca is reincarnation. Details can vary, just like Wiccans can vary. Basically, we are born into a new life after death to continue growing and learning. A lot like the Buddhist or Hindu view.

Another popular part of the Wiccan Afterlife is the Summerlands. Some believe that it is a paradise that we go to immediately after we die, and can be reunited with loved ones. After relaxing there for a while, your soul can be ready to be reborn into its next life.



CHRISTIAN

Christian ideas about the Afterlife are generally pretty well known since it's one of those mainstream religions that people are familiar with.

After you die, you either go to Heaven for eternal reward with God or to Hell for punishment. How it's decided which way you go isn't all that clear. There isn't any

complicated geography in either place, and no real cast of characters either. God rules over Heaven (along with his angels) and Satan rules in Hell.

If you believe that Jesus is your saviour and ask for forgiveness of your sins, then you will go to heaven when you die regardless of the things you have done. Otherwise, you go to Hell for punishment (they got the name from the Norse Goddess Hel, in case it sounds familiar).

Unlike most other views of the Afterlife, Christians put a much bigger focus on what you believe rather than how you've lived during your life. Sins are simply forgiven if you ask, and there are no penalties for doing bad things. What things are bad things? It depends on how strictly you follow the teachings of the Bible. There can be *hundreds* of sins, though most people would agree that the rules of the 10 Commandments are the really important ones.

Catholics (a certain kind of Christianity) also believe in Purgatory. That's the place you go immediately after you die, as a place to purify your soul even more before you get let into Heaven.

10 COMMANDMENTS

Worship no other Gods

Do not worship any idols or images

Respect the name of God

Rest on the Sabbath (Sunday)

Honor your mother and father

Do not kill

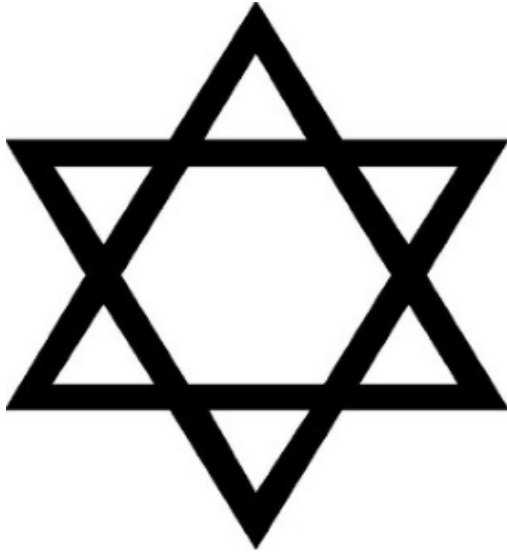
Honor your husband or wife

Don't steal

Don't lie about your neighbor

Don't desire your neighbor's things

Jewish



We couldn't really talk about major religions without mentioning Judaism, but there really isn't much to say.

The Jewish faith is filled with various rules and moral guidelines (depending on how strict you live your life), so it can be a bit of a surprise that there is almost nothing about the Afterlife in their beliefs.

Jewish people live by these rules because God has commanded them to, and they focus on their lives *now*. Heaven or Hell is not much of a concern, though some believe that souls receive reward in Gan Edan or punishment in Gehenna.

At the same time, there is also the belief that the dead will be physically resurrected when the Messiah comes to bring a new age of peace and prosperity to Earth.

In either case, it's known as Olam Ha-Ba, which means "the world to come". Not all scholars agree on what it means, so we sill just leave it at that.

And a Few More.....

Shinto

After death, your spirit joins the world of the Kami and is believed to watch over and help your remaining family and descendants.

Native American

Well, there were many hundreds of Native American tribes before European explorers came, and that means many hundred different ideas about the Afterlife. Generally, tribes believed in other worlds than this one, where spirits (both good and bad) existed. Some felt that our souls went to one of these places after death, but many thought that we reincarnated and returned to this world.

Santeria, Lukumi and Vodou

All of these African religions have been well-blended with Christian and Catholic ideas, there can be a strong belief in Heaven and Hell though most followers focus on their present life on Earth rather than the Afterlife. Sometimes, Heaven and Hell are just where the Gods or spirits live but not where our own souls go after death.

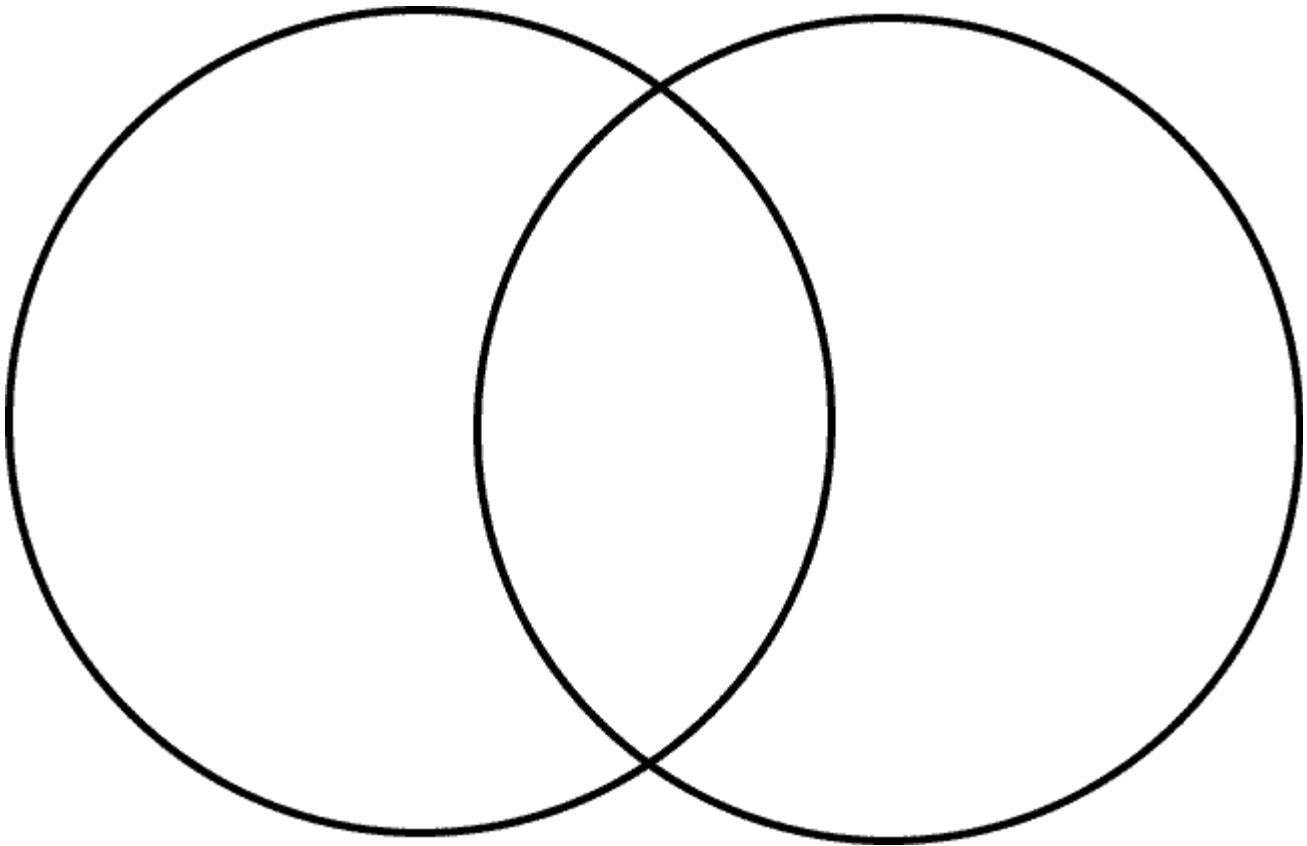
Keep Exploring the Afterlife!

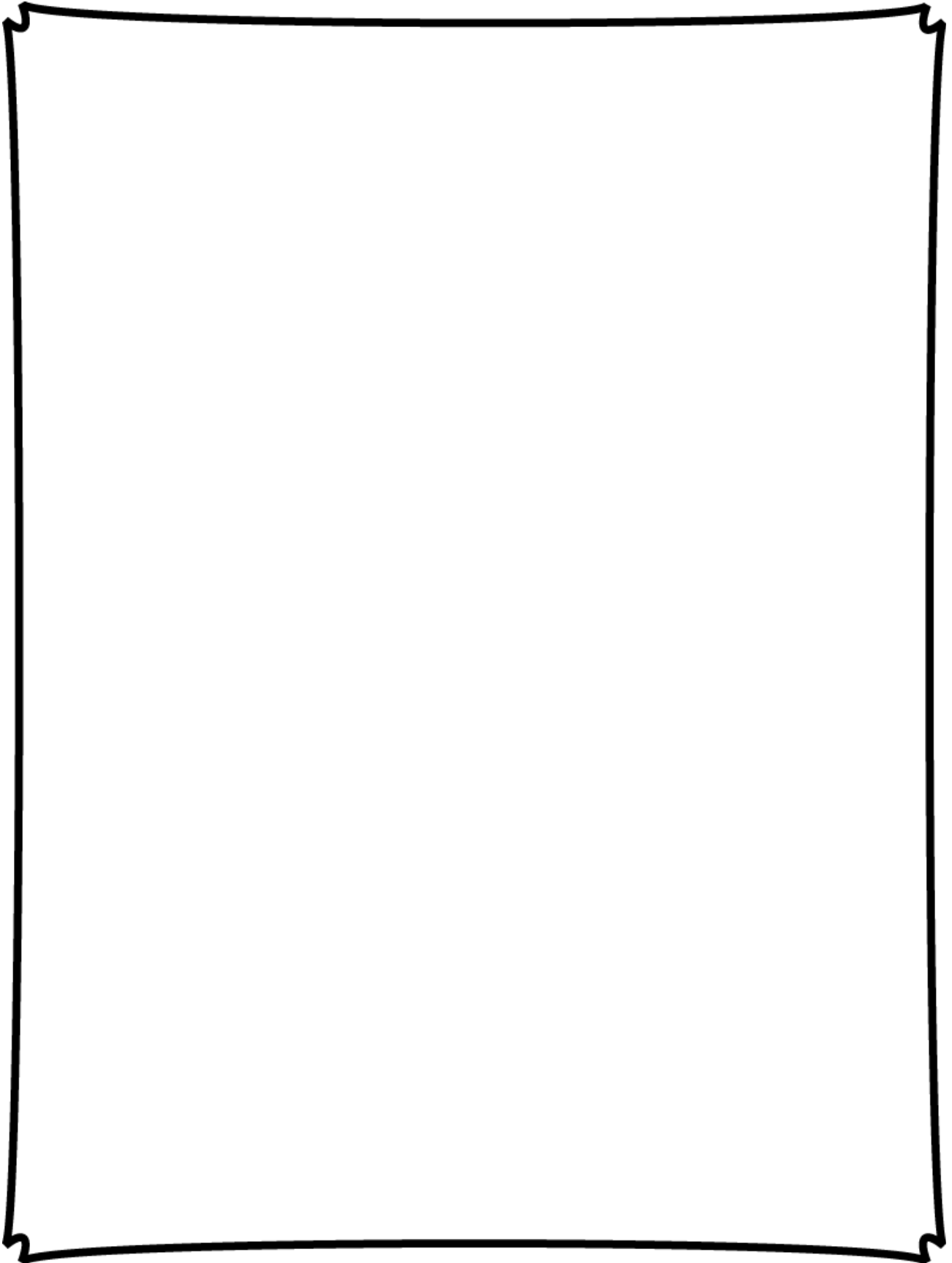
Which of these Afterlife ideas sounds the most interesting? Why?

Read through all 42 negative confessions of the Egyptians. Do you think it would be hard to avoid *all* 42 of them?

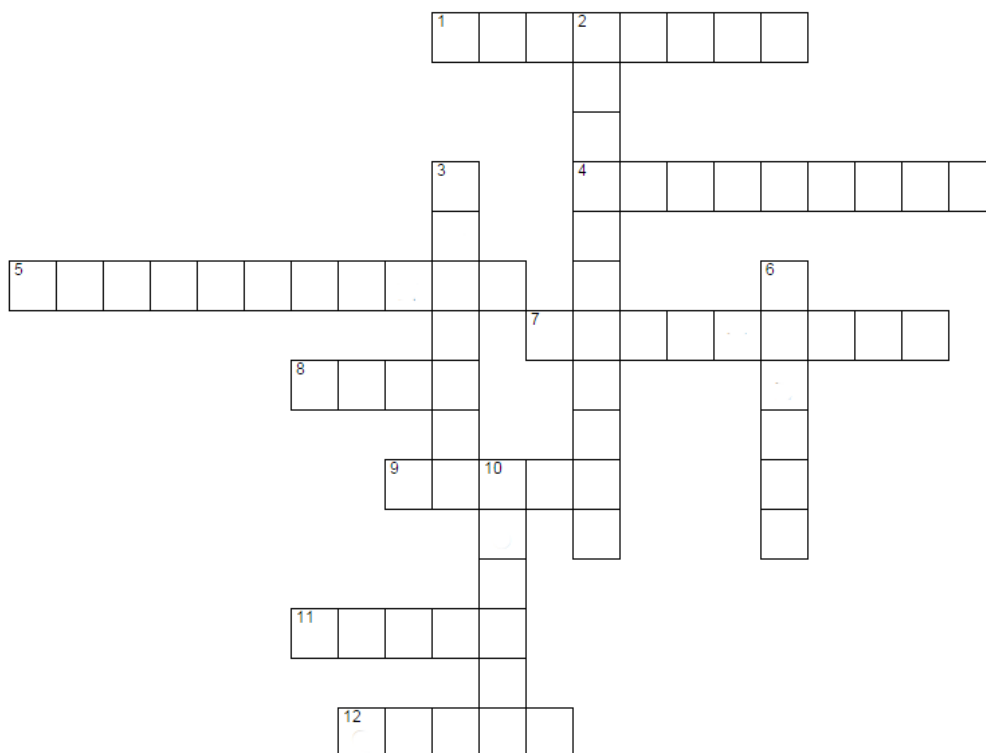
Do you believe something different from the ideas shown here? Describe the Afterlife as *you* see it.

Pick any 2 Afterlife beliefs, and see what things that are the same and things that are different:





What do You Remember?



Across:

1. Odin's hall in Asgard
4. Where Catholics feel you go before Heaven
5. A Wiccan view of Afterlife paradise
7. The spirits who collect the dead and take them to Asgard
8. Spirits of Shinto
9. Who will eat your soul if your heart doesn't balance against a feather?
11. Ruler of the Greek underworld
12. The holy book of Islam

Down:

2. One of the 9 noble virtues
3. Which religion doesn't worry too much about the Afterlife
6. Who believed that a 3-headed dog guards the gates to the Underworld
10. The Hindu name for the state of final enlightenment after many cycles of reincarnation