

Finding Heaven

Brett Wyatt

Dana pounded the polycarbonate desktop with both fists and let out an angry growl. The gravity simulation models didn't add up. Then, an audible growl came from my stomach.

"Let's take a break."

"These models are wrong! They don't coincide. What am I missing?"

"Dinner, you are missing dinner."

"You're not taking me seriously."

"It would be easier to help you if you let me in on your objective. You asked for my help as a coder, but these equations are beyond me. What are you trying to achieve? What's this all about?"

Dana's thick, long, Stygian hair electrified, and a look of desperation filled her aquamarine eyes. She bit down hard on her thin, pale lower lip as if to keep words from coming out of her mouth.

"I want to know that I will go to heaven."

My cheeks flushed bright red, and tears of laughter burst from my eyes. I struggled not to laugh out loud. She was serious, and my face betrayed the sarcasm and condescension I desperately held inside. She looked betrayed. I had crushed her unguarded moment of truthfulness like weeds beneath cows' hooves.

"You're mocking me."

"No, not at all. I'm shocked. What does gravity have to do with heaven?"

"Do you ever wonder about your soul? Where will you go after you die?"

At 25, I gave no thought to death, except during his bar mitzvah training. My mother insisted that I receive training from an orthodox rabbi. I thought it would be the worst year of my life, but he made it oddly enjoyable. He was a kabalist who studied mystical

and arcane ideas of Jewish tradition. He spun every word of my Parsha around into deep, powerful meanings. Every lesson ended with an examination of the soul.

“Years ago, when I was 14, I was taught every Jew has five levels of souls. After my bar mitzvah, I would pass on to the second level of the soul. By 18, my soul would transcend again.”

“What happens after that?”

“If you study the religious texts and follow all the laws, you keep ascending until you reach the fifth level.”

“Are you doing that?”

“Who has time? I worked hard to get to Mars. Besides, I can try again in the next life, if you believe in that.”

“Jews believe in reincarnation?”

“I guess so, don’t you?”

“No, my church doesn’t teach that.”

Dana was the director of satellite tracking, and I worked in her division. She asked me for help to develop code. I had no reason to talk to her about religion.

“An asteroid could strike us tomorrow, or worse, one of those nuclear-powered CCP satellites. Our lives would end.”

“Every asteroid from here to Jupiter is mapped, mined, or otherwise micro-managed. As for the CCP, they’ve been cleaning up their satellites after the one crashed down on New Shanghai Station. We’re safe.”

Dana gave me a peculiar look. Her facial muscles relaxed, and her eyes softened.

“Do you believe in souls?”

I don’t know. My bar mitzvah rabbi told me I have one. When I die, the soul will go to heaven. It will return to Earth to achieve perfection.”

“What happens to you?”

“I stay in heaven waiting for the end of days.”

She gave me a puzzled look.

“Each time a Jewish soul is born on Earth, it receives a new personality. In this life, this soul is called David. In the next life, it will be someone else.”

“That makes no sense.”

“Sort of. A soul is infinite. It can have many different persons. Each personality tries to bring it to the next highest level.”

“What will happen to you at the end of days?”

“I hope to spend eternity near the nosh table and open bar, flirting with the angel girls. I don't know and don't care.

“You said that your soul would return to Earth to try again. But what about Jews born on Mars?”

That was an interesting question. They taught me that souls return to Earth. There were hundreds of Jewish families living on Mars. Would that make any difference?

“Maybe souls get lost! That's it! People's souls are getting lost.”

“How's that possible? There's only one heaven.”

“I don't think so. There are many heavens. Think about how dimensions work. A point is bounded by a one-dimensional line. A line surrounds a plane in two-dimensional space, and three-dimensional volume encloses all two-dimensional geometries within. All iterations of shapes and forms within the volume exist within instantiations of time. If you ever read a Wrinkle in Time, it's a tesseract. But another dimension encapsulates time, maybe that's heaven, or heaven encapsulates it. If that's so, there could be many instances of heaven.”

“Seven heavens, or a tree of life. My old rabbi lost me on those ideas, but I see your point. I know that gravity distorts time. I coded GPS software and saw the equations for time correction. They are different here than on Earth. You're saying that there will be a similar distortion of heaven. The soul entering heaven from Earth will be displaced differently than a soul entering from Mars.

“That’s it exactly!”

“Great, I get it. It’s late, and I’m hungry. Can we order dinner?”

Dana laughed and patted my stomach. I tried not to notice that she had touched me that way. I think her forwardness surprised her, but I let it go when she placed an order for orange chicken and spring rolls.

“The problem is that we are on Mars, not Earth.”

“So what?”

“Imagine heaven as a dimension, like the three dimensions of reality and time.”

“That makes little sense. Heaven isn’t a physical thing. It’s not ‘up there’ or something like that. If it exists at all, then it’s in the spiritual realm.”

“That’s my point. It’s not a realm; it’s a dimension. We pass through a portal on Earth to the spiritual dimension. Your Jewish portal is specific to the Earth and its gravitational field. If gravity warps space-time, then it warps the spiritual dimension as well.”

“You’re out of my league here. Is this why you have been running gravity models?”

“Yes. I’ve been using string theory to calculate the offset caused by the differences in Earth and Mars’ gravity. I think there is considerable variation between the portals to heaven.”

“How do you know this?”

“I double-majored in history and physics. I’m concerned that if I die on Mars, I won’t go to my tier in heaven or heaven at all. How can I get married on Mars knowing that I may lose my family for eternity? My faith insists that everyone gets married.”

This revelation was freaking me out. Was she suggesting interest in me? Her smile was endearing, and her smooth complexion alluring. We were physically so different. My father was Ashkenazi, and my mother was Sephardic. I was thin; my hair was dark, my features were bold, and my arms hairy. Everything about me was in sharp contrast to the soft curves of her face and the fullness of her body.

“What church do you belong to?”

“Latter-Day Saints. We don’t believe in reincarnation. After death, our souls go to a special place in heaven where they wait for the end of days.”

“It’s not much different. My soul returns, but I’ll be stuck waiting too.”

Dana’s eyes seemed to transform from aquamarine to steel blue. Her lips turned dark red, and her face flushed, engorged in the passion of her words. She was glowing with inspiration, and her words were begging to make sense.

“But where in heaven will you be? In our heaven, we have tiers for the righteous and tiers for the unrighteous. I may not end up on the side of the righteous.”

“What about hell? I thought Christians believe non-believers go to hell.”

Dana smiled and held my hand. Her palm was warm and reassuring.

“We believe in the new revelation. Jesus doesn’t want anyone to suffer. Everyone gets another chance. Jews have a place in our heaven, right across from mine. If we don’t get lost, I’ll see you every day.”

The conversation was getting awkward, but I felt so comfortable with her..Was she only trying to convert, or was there more going on?

“My faith doesn’t have tiers. Our souls are said to gather around God. The most righteous receive the more light, the least righteous are in less light.:

“What if your soul isn’t perfect?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I’ll be seated in the back of heaven. It might be like the synagogues at High Holy Days. The important people sit in the front while everyone else sits in the back. Those without a ticket are in the lobby or outside on the patio. It works out fine if you like to socialize.”

“That’s kind of sad, David. Do you have friends on Mars?”

That was a tricky question. I didn't have many friends. Everyone was isolated, connected by social media groups and augmented realities. Tinder was an option, but a hook-up wasn't a friendship or a relationship.

"So if you're not married, what do you do in heaven?"

"Get married. Our heaven is a continuation of life, but with perfect bodies and perfect love."

"Let me get this straight. If we were a couple on Earth and, God forbid, one of us died, one of us would go to heaven and then..."

Dana gave me a sharp, coy look. Her lips curled up into a faint smile.

"Yes, and when I die, I will join you in heaven. We would continue to be a family, even have more children until the final redemption of Christ."

"But I'm a Jew."

"You'll be baptized in my faith."

"Will that change which heaven I go to?"

"Of course. You wouldn't be standing alone, outside of your synagogue, making small talk. You would be with our family and me in our home in heaven."

"Until the final redemption?"

"When we become perfect beings for eternity with God."

"But if we die on Mars, we may not end up in the correct heaven."

"That's true, but now I have another thought. Regardless of where the Martian portal takes us, we would end up together; we'd have eternity to find heaven."

"What if we get transferred to Ganymede and die there?"

"Different gravity, different distortion, but we'd be together. Are you interested in my faith?"

That was the million-dollar question. I never considered changing my religion.

“Your faith is one thing, but I am interested in you.”

“That’s a start. It’s late, and we have to wrap this up. I’ll see you tomorrow.”