



**Disembodied Souls:
The *Nefesh* in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the
Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the
Katumuwa Inscription**

Richard C. Steiner

A reevaluation of the concept of the soul based on the latest evidence

Biblical scholars have long claimed that the Israelites “could not conceive of a disembodied nefesh [soul].” Steiner rejects that claim based on a broad spectrum of textual, linguistic, archaeological, and anthropological evidence spanning the millennia from prehistoric times to the present. The biblical evidence includes a prophecy of Ezekiel condemning women who pretend to trap the wandering souls of sleeping people. The extrabiblical evidence suggests that a belief in the existence of disembodied souls was part of the common religious heritage of the peoples of the ancient Near East.

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- A reexamination of the evidence for and against disembodied souls in the Hebrew Bible
- A new look at the nature and behavior of disembodied souls in the Hebrew Bible
- A new study of the meaning and sociolinguistic background of the Katumuwa inscription

Richard C. Steiner is Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages and Literatures at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University. His publications include *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic* (American Oriental Society); *Stockmen from Tekoa, Sycomores from Sheba: A Study of Amos' Occupations* (Catholic Biblical Association of America); *A Biblical Translation in the Making: The Evolution and Impact of Saadia Gaon's Tafsīr* (Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies); and *Early Northwest Semitic Serpent Spells in the Pyramid Texts* (Harvard Semitic Museum/Eisenbrauns).

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