

**FROM WOMB TO TOMB TO THE WORLD BEYOND:
JOURNEY OF THE SOUL THROUGH
BIRTH, DEATH, AFTERLIFE AND REINCARNATION
IN KABBALAH AND MIDRASH**

**A COLLECTION OF TEXTS AND RESOURCES
PREPARED BY**

REB SIMCHA RAPHAEL, PH.D.



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*IN MEMORY OF
REB ZALMAN SCHACHTER-SHALOMI
AUGUST 17, 1924-JULY 3, 2014*

“And you shall keep it in your heart that you shall teach...”

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DA'AT Institute
drsimcha@daatinstitute.net
215.432.1211**

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FROM WOMB TO TOMB TO THE WORLD BEYOND: JOURNEY OF THE SOUL THROUGH BIRTH, DEATH, AFTERLIFE & REINCARNATION IN KABBALAH AND MIDRASH

Judaism presents a fascinating panorama of teachings that describe the ever-changing journey of the soul from birth to death, into the world beyond and reincarnation. In the spirit of Jewish renewal, we shall explore these texts as transformational maps of consciousness that provide insight and wisdom for joyfully living a spiritual life today.

Examining little-known texts from both Midrash and Kabbalah we shall continually ask the question how do these texts help us celebrate and live more fully, joyously and consciously - given the inevitability of human mortality and end-of-life transformation? Course will include textual study and *hevruta*, discussion and experiential exercises all of which are designed to help participants look more fully at the ever-changing journey of their own lives.

1. THE IN-WOMB TEXTS OF JEWISH MYSTICISM AND TRADITION

Course overview - The Journey of the Soul in Kabbalah

The Consciousness of the Fetus in Rabbinic Narratives

TEXTS: In-Womb Texts - *Seder Yetzirat Ha-Vlad* (A Midrashic text on life in the womb)

MEDITATION - Sensing the Destiny of Our Life in the Womb

2. THE DEATH-MOMENT IN ZOHAR

Language of Death & Dying in Hasidism and Contemporary Culture

Dying, Death-Moment Visions and A New Vision of Death-Care

TEXTS: Dying and Death Moment Visions in Kabbalah and Midrash

MEDITATION - Encountering Our Own Images of Death

3. THE AFTERLIFE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL IN ZOHAR

Afterlife as a Journey of Consciousness

Hibbut Ha-Kever (The Pangs of the Grave) and Gehenna as Psycho-Spiritual Purification

Afterlife Journey of the Soul: Practical Applications

TEXTS: *Hibbut HaKever*, Gehenna, Gan Eden in Zohar

MEDITATION - Encounter with Loved Ones in the World Beyond

4. GILGUL AND REINCARNATION IN ZOHAR AND LURIANIC KABBALAH

Evolution of Reincarnation/*Gilgul* Teachings in Kabbalah

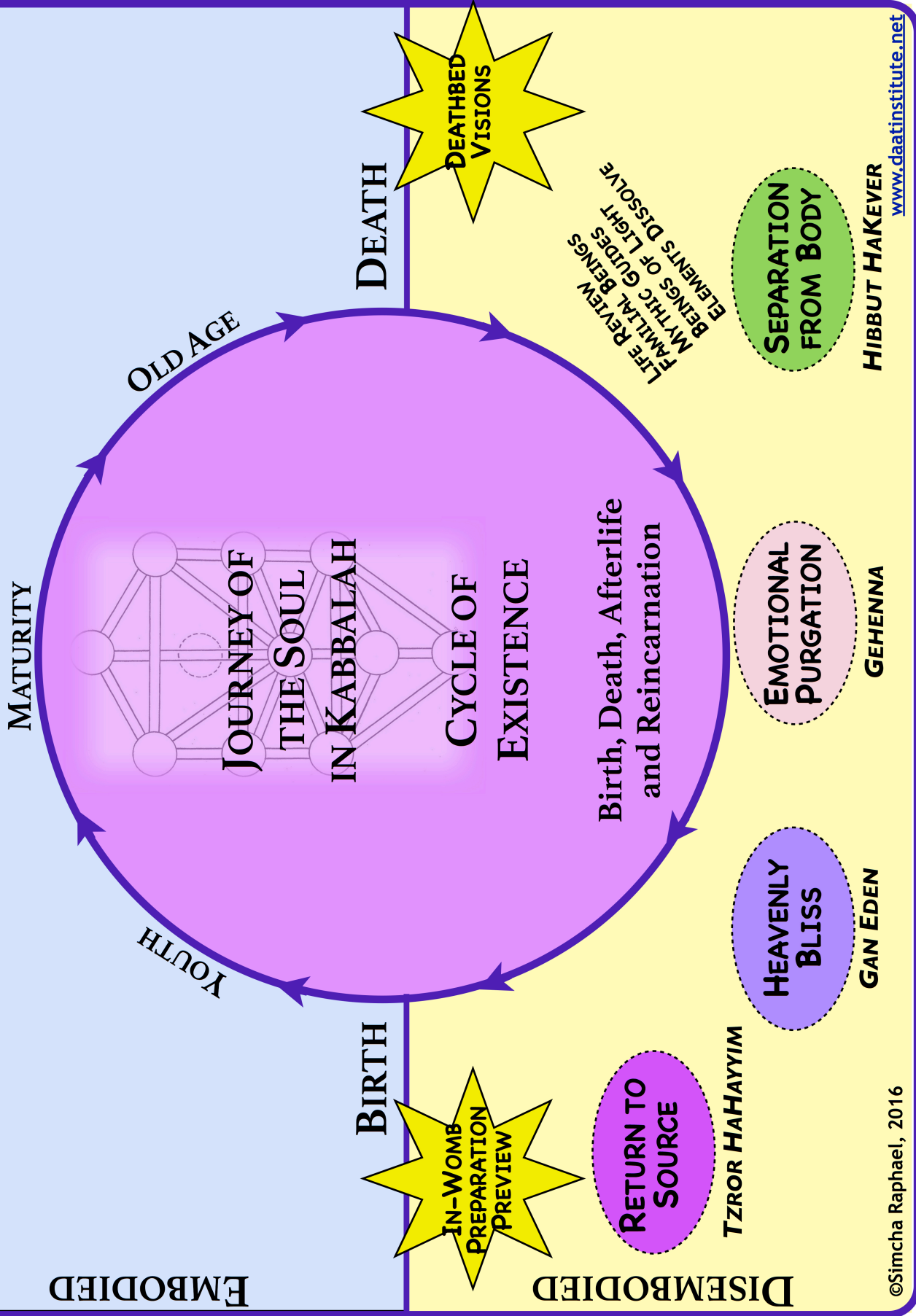
Reasons for Reincarnation/*Gilgul*

Implications of Reincarnation/*Gilgul* for Living Life Today

TEXTS: *Gilgul* in Sefer HaBahir, Zohar and *Shaar HaGilgulim*

MEDITATION - Past Life Recall - An Inner Journey

Reb Simcha Raphael, Ph.D. is Founding Director of the **DA'AT Institute for Death Awareness, Advocacy and Training**. Ordained as a Rabbinic Pastor by Reb Zalman, he works as a psychotherapist and spiritual director in Philadelphia, is Adjunct Professor in Psychology at Bryn Athyn College, and a members of the Rabbis Without Borders Network. He is author numerous publications on death and dying including the ground-breaking classic *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*. His website is www.daatinstitute.net.



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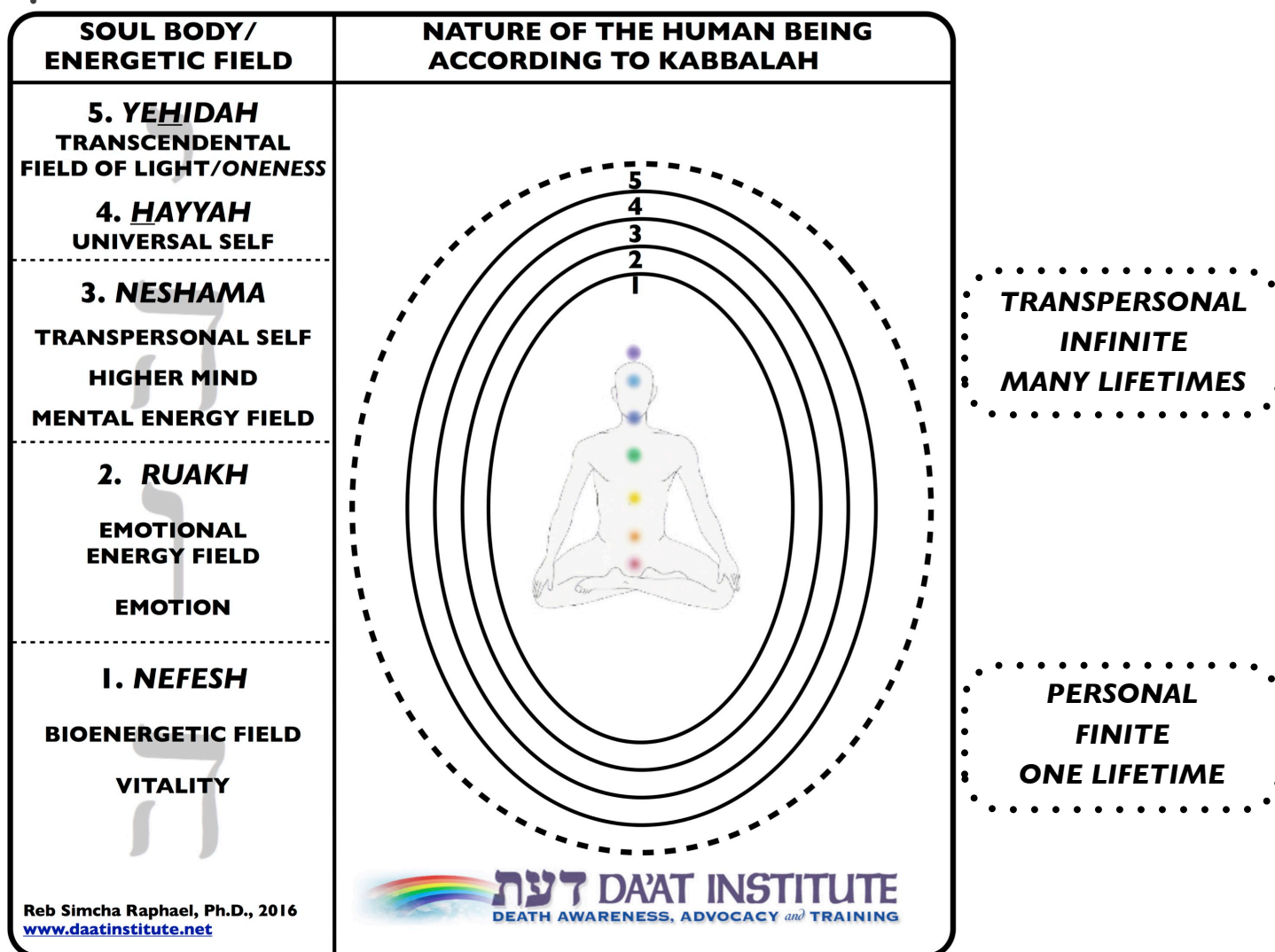
THE NATURE OF THE SOUL AND THE IN-WOMB EXPERIENCE IN KABBALAH AND MIDRASH

THREE LEVELS OF THE SOUL:

There are three levels that comprise the soul, and therefore the soul has three names: **NEFESH, RUAKH, and NESHAMA**. NEFESH...is the lowest of all. RUAKH is the [power of] sustenance, which rules over NEFESH and is a higher level than NEFESH, sustaining it throughout as is fitting. NESHAMA is the highest [power of] sustenance, and rules over all, a holy level, exalted above all. [Zohar I, 205b].

FIVE-FOLD MODEL OF THE SOUL:

... author of *Ra'aya Meheimna* speaks of **two additional, transcendent dimensions of the soul: HAYYAH and YEKHIDA**. [Zohar II, 158b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*)]. These other aspects of the soul "were considered to **represent the sublimest levels of intuitive cognition** within the grasp of only a few chosen individuals." (Winkler, *Soul of the Matter*, p. 7) All five component aspects of the soul are closely-intertwined, and operate in relationship to one another. (Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, p. 280)



PRE-EXISTENCE OF SOULS:

It has been taught: **The souls of all humanity even before they came down into the world, were engraved before God in the firmament, in the precise form that they were to assume in this world; and everything that they learn in this world they already knew before they came into the world...** This is the meaning of “*That which is, has already been; and that which is to be, has already been*” (Ecc. 3:15). [Zohar III, 61a-61b].

THE STOREHOUSE OF SOULS/GUF:

When the Holy Blessed One created the world He looked and saw that Israel in the future would receive Torah. He therefore hewed from his Throne all the souls that were to be placed within them and he **made in the world above a storehouse where all the souls that had been made from his Throne wait, and he called it “the body of souls” (Guf)**. [Zohar Hadash, I 10b-10c]

EMBRYO TAUGHT TORAH IN WOMB:

R. Simlai taught: A light burns above the head of [a fetus in the womb] and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, “then his lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness.”(Job 29:3)... *and it [the fetus in the womb] is also taught all the Torah from beginning to end* [BT Niddah 30b]

When the Holy Blessed One was about to give Israel the Torah, He said to them: Give me guarantors that you will observe it. They said, Our patriarchs will be our guarantors. He replied, They already are in my debt; may they fulfill their own obligations . . . give Me guarantors who are not yet in my debt . . . They said, 'Who is not in your debt?' He said to them, Babies. Forthwith **they brought their babies at the breast and those yet in the womb. Their mothers' bellies became as glass and they saw the Holy Blessed One from the womb** and spoke to Him. The Holy Blessed One said to them, Will you be guarantors for your parents, that if they do not observe the Torah, you will be held liable? They said, Yes! [Midrash Tehillim 8:4]

MIDRASH YETZIRAT HA-VLAD - FORMATION OF THE EMBRYO/FETUS:

What is the **mystery of the Formation of the Embryo?** In the hour when man is in service of his bed with his wife - בשמש מטתו עם אשתו - the Holy Blessed One beckons **THE ANGEL APPOINTED IN CHARGE OF PREGNANCY** - מלאך הממונה על ההריון - and says: 'Know that so-and-so emits seed tonight for the **FORMATION OF AN EMBRYO**, and you go and guard that drop and winnow it in the threshing floor to make it into 365 parts [*according to Talmudic tradition the human body comprises 365 parts*]. And so he does and says to the holy Blessed One and says, 'Master of the Universe, I did all You have commanded me. Now what will happen to to this drop? Instantly the Holy Blessed One decrees whether it will be strong or weak, male or female, rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, long or short. But **whether righteous or wicked God does not decree, for we have learned “Everything is in the hands of heaven, except fear of heaven.”**

MIDRASH YETZIRAT HA-VLAD (CONT'D):

God then beckons the **ANGEL IN CHARGE OF SOULS** - מלאך הממונה על רוחות - and says, 'Bring me a certain spirit which is hidden in the Garden of Eden, whose name is So-and-so.' . . . Immediately the soul comes before the Holy Blessed One and bows down and prostrates itself. The Holy Blessed One places it against its will into that drop, and the angels come and causes it to enter the womb of its mother. He **posts there two angels who guard him that he should not fall out, and they put a burning candle upon his head. And he looks and can see from the beginning of the world to its end.**

And in the morning the angel takes the soul (spirt) and leads him **into GAN EDEN and show the righteous who sit in glory** - הצדיקים היושבים בכבוד. The angel then says to the soul, 'These people whom you see there were formed like you in the womb of their mother. They went forth into the world and observed the laws and ordinances of the Holy Blessed One. **If you will do like them, after your death you will be rewarded with this exaltation and glory.** And if not, your end will be to go to the place which I am about to show you.

And in the evening the angel takes the soul (spirt) and leads him **into the GEHENNA, and shows him the wicked whom the angels of destruction** - מלכי חבלה - **beat and smite with rods of fire.** They cry, 'Woe, woe!' but no mercy is shown them. The angel then says to the soul, "Do you know, my child, who these are that burn?" 'No,' it replies. The angel answers, 'These were formed of the same origin as you. They went forth to the world and did not observe the laws and ordinances of the Holy Blessed One. Therefore they have come to this place of punishment. Therefore be not wicked but righteous.

The **angel guides the soul from morning until evening, and shows it every place which his [her] foot will tread, and the place where it will be buried.** After this... he places it back again in the womb of its mother and sustains the child in the womb of its mother for nine months.

At the end of that time the same angel says 'Come forth, for the time has come to go forth into the world.' **The angel touches him under the nose and puts out the candle over his head, and bring him out against his will, and he forgets everything he saw.** [Otzar Midrashim, I, 243; translation adapted from Raphael Patai, *Gates to the Old City*, pp. 378-371)

”היום בו נולדת
הוא היום בו הזכית הקב”ה
שהעולם אינו יכול להתקיים בלעדריך”

רבי נחמן מברסלב.

The day you were born is the
day God decided that the world
could not exist without you.

—Rabbi Nachman of Breslov