

**FROM ANCIENT ANCESTORS
TO SPIRIT GUIDES AND REINCARNATING SOULS -
JEWISH AFTERLIFE TRADITIONS
THROUGHOUT THE AGES**

TEXTS AND RESOURCES PREPARED BY

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In the final analysis, [Judaism] teaches us that between the world of the living and the world of the dead there is a window and not a wall. From earliest times, Jewish tradition has recognized that the living and the dead continue to interact in important and intimate ways. Jewish tradition teaches us to remember the dead: doing so will, in the long run, help us enhance the quality of life. Long after people die, their legacy lives on inside of us. Within the wellsprings of our infinite souls we find the window of connection between the living and the dead.

- Simcha Raphael, Jewish Views of the Afterlife

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FROM ANCIENT ANCESTORS TO SPIRIT GUIDES AND REINCARNATING SOULS: JEWISH AFTERLIFE TRADITIONS THROUGHOUT THE AGES

A heart-and-mind exploration of Jewish afterlife texts spanning three millennia of history. As travelers through time, we shall enter the worlds of Torah, Talmud, Midrash, Zohar and Hasidic tales investigating diverse ways Jews have understood the enigmatic mystery of death and the world beyond. In searching for spiritual renewal of traditional teachings, we shall use these texts for reflection and discussion discovering practical guidelines for responding to the human encounter with death - personally, and in our families and communities.

1) AFTERLIFE IN BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC TRADITION

Jacob's Burial Cave, Samuel's Presence in Sheol
Olam Haba and Visions of the Angel of Death

TEXTS - Tanach, Talmud, Midrash

MEDITATION – Encountering the Ancestors in the Cave of Makhpelah

2) AFTERLIFE IN KABBALISTIC TRADITION I: TEXT AND CONTEXT

Images of the Afterlife Journey in Zohar –
A Four Worlds Model Near-Death Experiences and the Dying Process in Zohar

TEXTS - Zohar, Hasidic Stories

MEDITATION – Traveling Through Realms of the Afterlife

3) AFTERLIFE IN KABBALISTIC TRADITION II: SOUL-GUIDING

Afterlife and the Soul's Journey in Zohar
Practical Applications for Working with the Dying and Bereaved

TEXTS - Zohar

MEDITATION – Attending Your Own Funeral

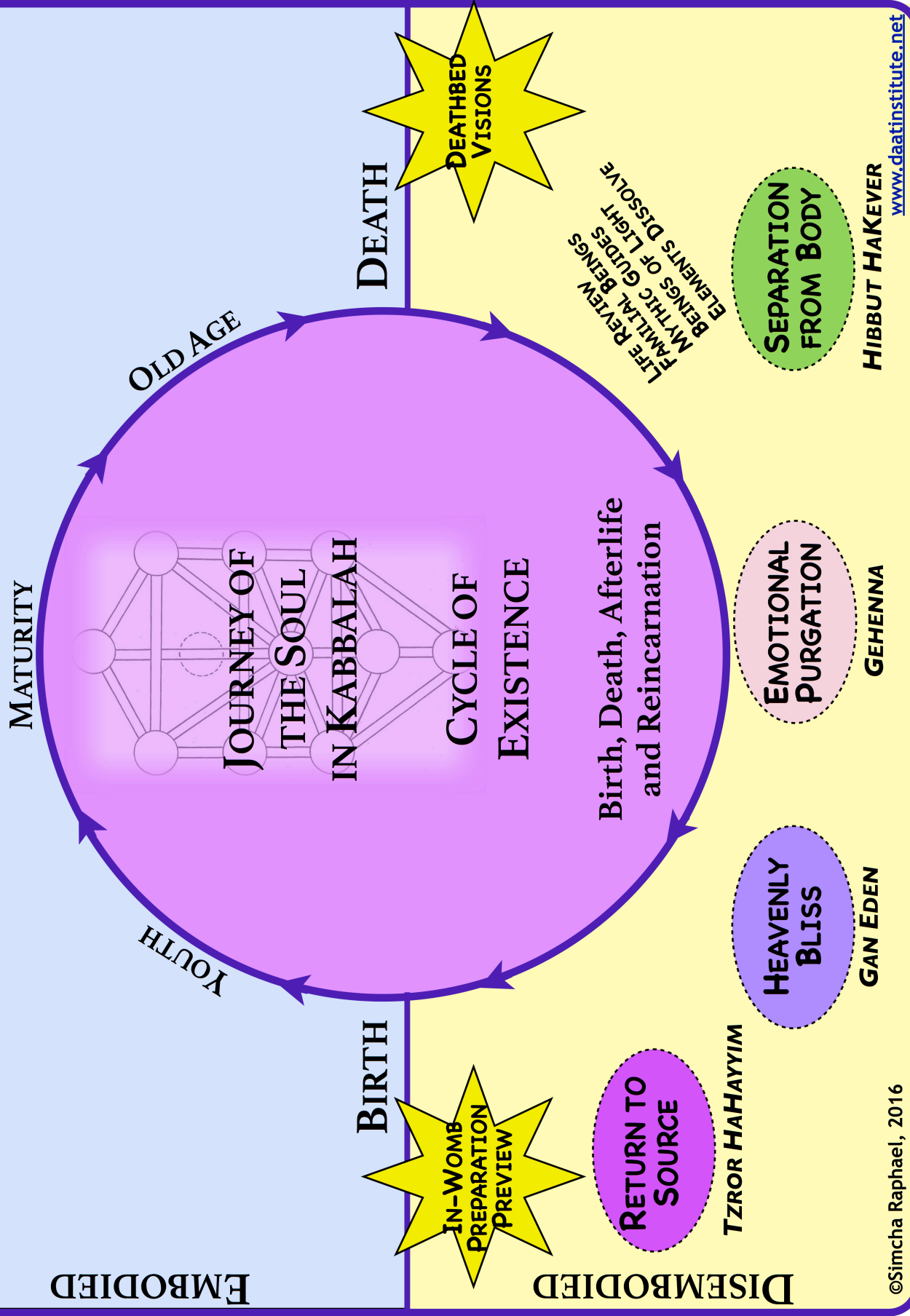
4) GILGUL AND REINCARNATION IN ZOHAR & LURIANIC KABBALAH

Evolution of Reincarnation/Gilgul Teachings in Kabbalah
Reasons for Reincarnation/Gilgul

TEXTS - *Sefer HaBahir*, Zohar and *Shaar HaGilgulim*

MEDITATION - Past Life Recall - An Inner Journey

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AFTERLIFE IN BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC JUDAISM

1. MODERNITY AND THE AFTERLIFE

Judaism celebrates life and the living. It dwells on life here rather than on the hereafter as other religious faiths do. Life is precious, the here and the now." [Jean Herschaft, "Patient Should Not Be Told of Terminal Illness: Rabbi," *Jewish Post and Opinion* (NY), 13 March 1981, p. 12.]

Dead is dead - "what lives on are the children and a legacy of good works."

[Rabbi Terry Bard, Director Pastoral Services, Beth Israel Hospital, quoted by Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven", *Newsweek*, (March 27, 1989) pp. 52ff.]

2. ANCESTRAL FAMILY TOMB

Then [Jacob] gave them these instructions: "I am about to be **gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah**, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites. "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was **gathered to his people**. (Gen 29:28-33)

3. PROPHET SAMUEL RETURNS FROM THE UNDERWORLD OF SHEOL

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. **Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land**. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of Y*H*V*H, but Y*H*V*H did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a **medium***, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. **So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said**, "and bring up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. **He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land**. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Saul swore to her by Y*H*V*H, "As surely as Y*H*V*H lives, you will not be punished for this."

Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself... face to the ground. (1 Samuel 28:3-14)

4. REACTIONS TO SPIRITISM/CONTACT WITH DEAD

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or **who** is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead (Deut. 18:10-1)

וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב וְיִדְּעָנִי וְדֹרֵשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים

Furthermore, **Josiah got rid of the necromancers and the mediums**, the household gods, and the fetishes - all the detestable things that were to be seen in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of YHVH. (2 Kings 23:24)

וְגַם אֶת־הָאֲבוֹת וְאֶת־הַיִּדְעָנִים וְאֶת־הַתְּרָפִים וְאֶת־הַגְּלָלִים .

I have not eaten of it [consecrated food] in my mourning, neither have I consumed any part of it when unclean, nor given of it for the dead, but I have harkened to the voice of Y*H*V*H my God. (Deut. 26:14)

4. CHANGING IMAGES OF SHEOL - AN A-MORAL UNDERWORLD REALM

Says Jacob - "If any harm came to him [Benjamin] on the journey you are to undertake, you would send me down to Sheol with my white head bowed in grief" (Gen. 42:38).

4a. CHANGING IMAGES OF SHEOL - A DARK SUBTERRANEAN REALM

"Your magnificence has been flung down to Sheol... underneath a bed of maggots and over you a blanket of worms" (Isa. 14:11).

5. COLLECTIVE ESCHATOLOGY - UNIVERSAL VISION OF REDEMPTION

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Y*H*V*H's house shall be established on top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Y*H*V*H, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of His ways so that we may walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go for Torah and the word of Y*H*V*H from Jerusalem'. (Isa. 2:2-3)

6. NATIONAL RESURRECTION IN EZEKIEL (6TH CENTURY B.C.E)

The hand of Y*H*V*H was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of Y*H*V*H, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and he caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? ...O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am Y*H*V*H, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and have brought you up out of your graves ((Ezek. 37:1ff)



7. RESURRECTION IN DANIEL (2ND CENT. BCE)

There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation till that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one who shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, **some to shame and everlasting contempt.** (Dan. 12:1-2)

AFTERLIFE IN RABBINIC JUDAISM

8. OLAM HABA - RABBINIC NOTION OF THE WORLD TO COME

Better is **one hour of repentance and good works in This World (Olam HaZeh)** than the whole life of the World to Come. Better is **one hour of bliss in the World to Come** than the whole of life in this world." (M.Avot 4:17)

9. OLAM HABA - POST-MORTEM OR MESSIANIC?

Not like this world will be the **World to Come [Olam Haba]**. In this world one has the trouble to harvest grapes and press them; but in the World to Come a person will bring a single grape in a wagon or a ship, store it in the corner of his house, and draw from it enough wine to fill it a large flagon... There will not be a grape which will not yield thirty measures of wine (Keth. 111b).

My Torah will guide you in your path in this world, it will watch over you in your sleep, at the hour of death, and **when you wake in Olam Haba [World to Come]** (Sifre, Lev. 18:4)

10. GEHENNA AND GAN EDEN

Each of the seven classes in Gan Eden has a dwelling for itself, and correspondingly there are seven storeys for the wicked in Gehinnom, their names being: **Sheol**, **Abbadon** [Destruction], **Tzalmavet** [Shadow of Death], **Eretz Takhtit** [Nether World], **Eretz Neshiyah** [Realm of Forgetfulness], **Gehinnom**, and **Dumah** [Silence] (Mid. Ps. 11:6).

Rabbi Eliezer asked Rabbi Joshua: "What should a man do **to escape the judgement of Gehenna?**" He replied: "Let him occupy himself with good deeds" (Midr. Prov. 17:1, 42b)

...judgement of generation of the Flood lasted **twelve months** in Gehenna (Gen. R. 28:8).

...after going down to Gehenna and receiving the punishment due him, the sinner is forgiven from all his iniquities, and like an arrow from the bow he is **flung forth from Gehenna** (Pesikta Rabbati 53.2).

11. MYTHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF GAN EDEN

Gan Eden has **two gates of ruby**, by which stand **sixty myriads of ministering angels**. The luster of the face of each of them glistens like the splendor of the firmament. When a righteous person arrives, they divest him in white robes of the clouds of glory, set two crowns upon his head, one made of gems and pearls and the other of gold... each person has a chamber allotted to him by himself according to the honor due him. From it issues four streams, one of milk, one of wine, one of balsam, and one of honey; and above every chamber there is a golden vine studded with thirty pearls, each one of them glistening like the brilliance of the planet Venus... (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshit 20).

12. RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

There is no section of the Torah which does not imply the doctrine of Resurrection, but we have not the capacity to expound it in this sense (Sifre Deut. 306; 132a).

The Holy Blessed One will burrow the earth before them and their bodies will roll through the excavation like bottles, and when they arrive at the land of Israel their soul will be reunited to them.(P. Keth. 35b)

13. PHENOMENA OF THE AFTER-DEATH JOURNEY

When a man departs to his eternal home **all his deeds are enumerated before him and he is told: “Such and such a thing have you done, in such and such a place on that day.”** Admitting to the justice of the verdict the individual then signs the record shown to him saying, "Rightly have You judged me" (Taan. 11a).

As they are about to depart from this world, the righteous are shown the reward rightfully due to them, and they rejoice in such sublime vision (Ex. R. 52:3).

Angels are assigned to every human being. And every day they record his deeds, so that everything he does is known to the Holy Blessed One, and everything is put down on his record and marked with a seal. When a man is righteous, his righteousness is recorded; when a man does wrong, his wrongdoing is recorded. Accordingly, when a righteous man arrives at the end of his days, his recording angels precede him into heaven singing his praise... But when a wicked man dies, a man who did not bring himself to turn in repentance to God, the Holy Blessed One, says to him: “Let your soul be blasted in despair! How many times did I call upon you to repent, and you did not.” (Pesikta Rabbati, 44:8)

14. OLAM NESHAMOT - THE WORLD OF SOULS

In any case, concerning the meaning of **Olam Haba [the World to Come]**, we have learned that is a world in which the body, the Sanctuary, and its vessels will be present; it is not **Olam HaNeshamot [the World of Souls]** in which every man receives his due immediately after death. [Nahmanides, *The Gate of Reward*, p. 107]

15. SPIRIT WORLD IN JEWISH FOLK RELIGION

...a man who fell asleep in a synagogue and was locked in by the sexton [and] awoke to find himself in the midst of... a spirit congregation; to his amazement he discerned the forms of two men who were still among the living. Sure enough, within a few days these two passed away. (Quoted by Trachtenberg, p. 62).

[Legend tells] of a R. Benjamin ben Zerah who, on his deathbed, promised to warn members of his congregation if any disaster impended. A short while after his demise he appeared in the synagogue & divulged that at the instant of death he had seen a heavenly decree inflicting a persecution upon them. (Trachtenberg, p. 223).