

What Happens Before, During, & After Your Lifetime?

THE SOUL:

1. **Bereishis 2,7:** וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ :the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.
2. **Ramban:** When you blow, you blow from yourself. (Hashem blew into man something of Himself)
3. A soul is not a piece of G-d - "air in balloon" parable.
4. **Talmud Berachos 10a:** Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, fills the entire world, so too the soul fills the entire body. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sees but is not seen, so too does the soul see, but is not seen. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sustains the entire world, so too the soul sustains the entire body. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, is pure, so too is the soul pure. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, resides in a chamber within a chamber, in His inner sanctum, so too the soul resides in a chamber within a chamber, in the innermost recesses of the body. Therefore, that which has these five characteristics, the soul, should come and praise He Who has these five characteristics.
5. **Definition of "Soul":** The soul, or *neshamah*, is the self, the "I" that inhabits the body and acts through it. Without the soul, the body is like a light bulb without electricity, a computer without the software, a space suit with no astronaut inside. With the introduction of the soul, the body acquires life, sight and hearing, thought and speech, intelligence and emotions, will and desire, personality and identity.
6. **Everything has a soul:** Not just the human being, but also every created entity possesses a "soul."
7. Animals have souls, as do plants and even inanimate objects; every blade of grass has a soul, and every grain of sand.
8. Not only life, but also existence requires a soul to sustain it—a "**spark of G-dliness**" that perpetually imbues its object with being and significance.
9. A soul is not just the engine of life; it also embodies the *why* of a thing's existence, its meaning and purpose. It is a thing's "inner identity, its *raison d'être*."
10. **Moshol:** Just like the 'soul' of a musical composition is the composer's vision that energizes and gives life to the notes played in a musical composition—the actual notes are like the body expressing the vision and feeling of the soul within them.
11. **POINT:** Each soul is the expression of G-d's intent and vision in creating that particular being.
12. **Two Souls:** There are two distinct souls that vitalize the human being: an "Animal Soul" and a "G-dly Soul."
13. **Animal Soul:** is driven by the quest for self-preservation and self-enhancement; in this, it resembles the soul and self of all other creations.
14. **G-dly Soul:** a soul driven by the desire to reconnect with its Source. Our lives are the story of the contest and interplay between these two souls, as we struggle to balance and reconcile our physical needs and desires with our spiritual aspirations, our self-focused drives with our altruistic yearnings.

15. These two souls do not reside "side-by-side" within the body; rather, the G-dly Soul is encloded within the Animal Soul—just as the Animal Soul is encloded within the body. This means that the Animal Soul, too, is vitalized by the "part of G-d above" at its core. Ostensibly, the two souls are in conflict with each other, but in essence they are compatible.
16. **Choice:** The Divine essence of the human soul is what sets the human being above and apart from all other creations, even the angels.
17. The angel may be more spiritual, but the human being is more G-dly.
18. No creation can possess true freedom of choice—a creation, by definition, has and consists of only what its creator has imparted to it; this is its "nature," and its every inclination and action will be dictated by that nature.
19. Only in the human soul that the Creator imparted of His own essence, has freedom of choice. The human soul is thus the only truly "supra-natural" being (aside from the Creator)--a being that is not limited by its own nature. A being that can transcend itself; a being that can choose to not merely react to its environment, but to act upon it; a being whose choices and actions are therefore of true *significance*.

4 GENERAL PHASES IN A SOUL'S JOURNEY:

- The wholly spiritual existence of the soul before it enters the body
- Physical life
- Post-physical life in the "World of Souls"
- The "world to come" (*olam haba*) that follows the resurrection of the dead.

PHASE #1:

1. **QUESTION:** What happens before you live?
2. **ANSWER:** A soul is formed in the womb of supernal spiritual realms, in the "world of souls" near the Throne of Glory, where it enjoys its closeness to Hashem in the world of souls.
3. **PROBLEM:** Even though the pleasure is immense - it is limited, because it has not been earned. The soul has not yet developed its own "Godliness" in order to enjoy even greater closeness.
4. **SOLUTION:** The soul acquires a distinct identity and missions from God. It is the general mission that every Jew has, and a specific mission unique to that soul.
5. **FULFILLING THE MISSION:** It is dispatched to the physical realm, encloded within an Animal Soul and equipped with a body. Here the G-dly Soul is challenged by the (apparently) conflicting needs and desires of the Animal Soul; here divine reality is obscured by the dense selfhood of the body and physical world. In this arena of hidden truth and perpetual challenge, the soul can fully express and actualize its divine power. Here is where it can fully develop, express itself, and actualize its great potential.
6. ***Here is where the soul can manifest itself and "create itself" as an entity totally deserving the ultimate pleasure of totally bonding with the Creator, when it returns to Him.***
7. **Talmud Niddah 30b:** The fetus in its mother's womb is taught the entire Torah . . . When its time comes to emerge into the atmosphere of the world, an angel comes and slaps it on its mouth, making it forget everything.

8. **POINT:** In its pre-physical existence, the soul is fortified with the divine wisdom, knowledge and vision that will empower it in its struggles to transcend and transform the physical reality.
9. **QUESTION:** If we are made to forget it all, why teach it to us in the first place?
10. **ANSWER:** Herein lies the entire paradox of knowledge and choice: we can't see the truth, we can't even manifestly know it, but at the same time we *do* know it, deep inside us. Deep enough that we can choose to ignore it, but also deep enough that wherever we are and whatever we become, we can always choose to unearth it. This, in the final analysis, is choice: our choice to pursue the knowledge implanted in our soul, or to suppress it.

PHASE #2:

1. Just like an astronaut survives in space with a space suit, so too does the soul survive on earth with an "earth suit" - the body.
2. The body is a "garment of the soul."
3. **GUIDANCE & NURTURE:** The soul is provided with a compass and guidebook to navigate the challenge of physical life, and the resources to fortify it.
4. The Torah is the divine "blueprint for creation" that guides and instructs the soul on its mission in life.
5. The Torah is also "food for the soul": by studying Torah the soul ingests and digests the divine wisdom and is supplied with the divine energy to persevere in its mission and overcome its challenges.
6. **MITZVOS:** A mitzvah is a G-dly deed. Every time a soul performs a mitzvah—giving a coin to charity, putting on *tefillin*, lighting Shabbat candles—it acts as a "partner with G-d in creation" and brings G-d's presence into the world.
7. The mitzvos are all physical deeds—so the soul can perform them only while a resident of the physical world, invested within an Animal Soul and a body.
8. ***The duration of its physical life is the soul's only opportunity to perform mitzvos, and fulfill its unique mission.***
9. This world is ultimately a preparatory world we are passing through, as explained by a story with the Chofetz Chaim.
10. Everything that comes before and after is just a prequel and sequel to the soul's greatest and loftiest moments—its acts of connecting the G-dly with the mundane.
11. **THE CHALLENGE:** Everything physical is, by definition, finite; indeed, that is what makes it a concealment of the infinitude of the divine.
12. Intrinsic to physical life is that it is finite in time: it ends.
13. Once it ends—once our soul is freed from its physical embodiment—we can no longer achieve and accomplish.
14. But in the next world, finally, we can behold and derive a ***greater satisfaction*** from what we have accomplished in this world.
15. The two are mutually exclusive: achievement precludes greater satisfaction; greater satisfaction precludes achievement.
16. Achievement can take place only in the spiritual blindness of the physical world; greater satisfaction can take place only in the choice-less environment of the spiritual reality.
17. **Talmud Eruvin 22a:** You shall keep the mitzvah, the decrees and the laws which I command you today to do them." "Today to do them," - "but not to do them tomorrow. Today to do them, and tomorrow to receive their reward.

18. However, there are moments of “dveikus” in this world that can give us taste of this greater satisfaction - like Shabbos.
19. **Talmud Shabbos 91b:** All who busy themselves singing song in this world, merit to sing it in the World to Come.
20. **POINT:** This world is designed to be enjoyable to the point of “singing”, which is a prelude to even greater singing in the World to Come.

PHASE #3:

1. **Pirkei Avos 4,17:** A single moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is greater than all of the world to come. And a single moment of bliss in the world to come is greater than all of this world.”
2. **MOSHOL:** It’s as if we spent a hundred years watching an orchestra performing a symphony on television—with the sound turned off. We watched the hand movements of the conductor and the musicians. Sometimes we asked: why are the people on the screen making all these strange motions to no purpose? Sometimes we understood that a great piece of music was being played, but didn’t hear a single note.
3. After a hundred years of watching in silence, we watch it again—this time with the sound turned on. The orchestra is ourselves, and the music—played well or poorly—is the deeds of our lives.
4. **QUESTION:** Is death the end of existence ?
5. **ANSWER:** No ! the First Law of Thermodynamics is that no energy is ever “lost” or destroyed; it only assumes another form. If such is the case with physical energy, how much more so a spiritual entity such as the soul, whose existence is not limited by time, space, or any of the other delineators of the physical state.
6. Certainly, the spiritual energy that in the human being is the source of sight and hearing, emotion and intellect, will and consciousness does not cease to exist merely because the physical body has ceased to function; rather, it passes from one form of existence (physical life as expressed and acted via the body) to a higher, exclusively spiritual form of existence.
7. **QUESTION:** What happens after you die?
8. **ANSWER:** Upon conclusion of its physical life-span, the soul resumes a purely spiritual state in Olam Haba - the “world of souls”. It can no longer perform mitzvos, but the G-dly deeds it performed during its physical lifetime have elevated it to heights it could not even had contemplated before its descent.
9. These mitzvos are like seeds which take root in the soil of the physical world and grow and multiply, further fueling the soul's ascent; as do the good deeds performed in the physical world by others for the merit of the departed soul.
10. Death is not perceived merely as the end of life, but rather represents the ***beginning of the body’s process of purification to prepare it for the world to come.***
11. Parable of a faulty machine that must be repaired and reassembled. Body must go through decomposition in order to be reassembled at the time of resurrection.
12. The exceptions which prove the rule : Vilna Gaon’s body not decomposing, etc.
13. This explains the custom of eating round foods in a Shiva house.
14. “Tov Meod” – this is death. Death is an opportunity to go beyond the human beings limitations.
15. Death is there in order to facilitate the “growth experience.”

16. **MORE SPECIFIC:** After death, the soul returns to its divine Source, together with all the G-dliness it has “extracted” from the physical world by using it for meaningful purposes. The soul now relives its experiences on another plane, and experiences the good it accomplished during its physical lifetime as incredible happiness and pleasure, and the negative as incredibly painful.
17. This pleasure and pain are not reward and punishment in the conventional sense—in the sense that we might punish a criminal by sending him to jail, or reward a dedicated employee with a raise. It is rather that ***we experience our own life in its reality—a reality from which we were sheltered during our physical lifetimes.*** We experience the true import and effect of our actions. Turning up the volume on that TV set with that symphony orchestra can be intensely pleasurable, or intensely painful—depending on how we played the music of our lives.
18. (The sages speak about a “Gehenna of fire,” in which we experience the full destructive “heat” of our illicit desires, anger and hatreds; and a “Gehenna of snow,” in which we are exposed to the “coldness” of our moments of indifference to G-d and to our fellows.)
19. When the soul departs from the body, it stands before the heavenly court to give a “judgment and accounting” of its earthly life.
20. The heavenly court does only the “accounting” part. [See appendix “Are you prepared for the 10 questions on the final exam?”]
21. The “judgment” part—that, only the soul itself can do Only the soul can pass judgment on itself; only it can know and sense the true extent of what it accomplished, or neglected to accomplish, in the course of its physical life.
22. Freed from the limitations and concealments of the physical state, it can now see G-dliness; it can now look back at its own life and experience what it truly was.
23. **GAN EDEN:** The soul’s experience of the G-dliness it brought into the world with its mitzvos and positive actions is the exquisite pleasure of Gan Eden (the “Garden of Eden”—Paradise);
24. This world is like a waiting room where the soul ***gets a taste of the pleasure of the world to come.*** The soul only has maximum pleasure when it reunites with the body.
25. ***The degree of pleasure that it gets in this “Olam Haneshomos” is based on what you do in your lifetime.***
26. **GEHINNOM:** its experience of the destructiveness it wrought through its lapses and transgressions is the excruciating pain of Gehinnom
27. The truth hurts. The truth also cleanses and heals. The spiritual pain of Gehinnom—the soul’s pain in facing the truth of its life—cleanses and heals the soul of the spiritual stains and blemishes that its failings and misdeeds have attached to it.
28. Freed of this husk of negativity, the soul is now able to fully enjoy the immeasurable good that its life engendered, and “bask in the divine radiance” emitted by the G-dliness it brought into the world.
29. It can now prepare itself for its ultimate reuniting with the body at later date.
30. A G-dly soul spawns far more good in its lifetime than evil. The core of the soul is unadulterated goodness; the good we accomplish is infinite, the evil but shallow and superficial. So ***even the most wicked of souls, experiences at most twelve months of Gehinnom, followed by an eternity of heaven.***
31. ***A soul’s experience of Gehinnom can be mitigated by the action of his or her children and loved ones, here on earth.*** Reciting *kaddish* and engaging in other good

deeds “in merit of” and “for the elevation of” the departed soul means that the soul, in effect, is continuing to act positively upon the physical world, thereby adding to the goodness of its physical lifetime.

32. The soul, for its part, remains involved in the lives of those it leaves behind when it departs physical life. The soul of a parent continues to watch over the lives of his or her children and grandchildren, to derive pride (or pain) from their deeds and accomplishments, and to intercede on their behalf before the heavenly throne; the same applies to those to whom a soul was connected with bonds of love, friendship and community.
33. Because the soul is no longer constricted by the limitations of the physical state, its relationship with its loved ones is, in many ways, even deeper and more meaningful than before.
34. However, while the departed soul is aware and cognizant of all that transpires in the lives of its loved ones, the souls remaining in the physical world are limited to what they can perceive via the five senses as facilitated by their physical bodies.
35. We can impact the soul of a departed loved one through our positive actions, but we cannot communicate with it through the conventional means (speech, sight, physical contact, etc.) that, prior to its passing, defined the way that we related to each other. (Indeed, the Torah expressly forbids the idolatrous practices of necromancy, mediumism and similar attempts to “make contact” with the world of the dead.) Hence, the occurrence of death, while signifying an elevation for the soul of the departed, is experienced as a tragic loss for those it leaves behind.

REINCARNATION:

1. At times, a soul may not conclude its mission in a single lifetime. In such cases, it returns to earth for a “second go” to complete the job. This is the concept of *gilgul neshamot*—commonly referred to as “reincarnation”.
2. This may explain why we often find ourselves powerfully drawn to a particular mitzvah or cause and make it the focus of our lives, dedicating to it a seemingly disproportionate part of our time and energy: it is our soul gravitating to the “missing pieces” of its divinely ordained purpose.
3. There are those who don’t yet merit Gilgul and must be in the “Kaf Hakeleh” to aimlessly drift in nowhere land for a period of time. This is the source for the concept of a “Dibbuk.”

STAGE #4:

1. Just as the individual soul passes through three stages—preparation for its mission, the mission itself, and the subsequent phase of satisfaction and reward—so, too, does creation as a whole.
 - A chain of spiritual “worlds” precedes the physical reality, to serve it as a source of divine vitality and empowerment.
 - Then comes the era of *olam hazeh* (“this world”), in which the divine purpose of creation is played out.
 - Finally, once humanity as a whole has completed its mission of making the physical world a “dwelling-place for G-d,” comes the era of *universal* reward—the “world to come” (*olam haba*).
2. There is a major difference between a soul’s individual “world of reward” in Gan Eden, and the universal reward of the world to come.

3. Gan Eden is a spiritual world, inhabited by souls without physical bodies; the World to Come is a physical world, inhabited by souls *with* physical bodies (though the very nature of the physical will undergo a fundamental transformation).
4. In the World to Come, the physical reality will so perfectly “house” and reflect the divine reality that it will transcend the finitude and temporality which define it today.
5. While in today’s imperfect world the soul can experience “reward” only after it departs from the body and physical life, in the world to come the soul and body will be reunited and will together enjoy the fruits of their labor.
6. The prophets of Israel spoke of a time when all who died will be restored to life: their bodies will be regenerated and their souls restored to their bodies.
7. **Isaiah 25,8:** Death will be eradicated forever,”
8. **Isaiah 11,9:** the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the water covers the seabed.”
9. This will spell the end of the “Era of Achievement.” The veil of physicality will no longer conceal the truth of G-d, but will rather express it and reveal it in an even more profound way than the most lofty spiritual reality.
10. Goodness and G-dliness will cease to be something we do and achieve, for it will be what we are. ***Our experience of goodness will be absolute.***
11. Body and soul both, reunited as they were before they were separated by death, will inhabit all the good that we accomplished with our freely chosen actions in the challenges and concealments of physical life.
12. However, the body will clearly be viewed as the “junior partner” and will primarily serve as an appendage to the soul.
13. In the World to Come, the entirety of creation will fully and uninhibitedly reflect the infinity and perfection of its Creator, and the physical will transcend the finitude and mortality which define it in today's imperfect world.
14. This period of time will last for 1,000 years.

MOSHIACH:

1. The `Messianic era is the transition between “Olam Haze” & “Olam Haba.”
2. The Messianic era will consist of two periods:
3. During the first period, the world will be at peace and the Jews will be autonomous—but everything will continue operating according to the laws of nature.
4. The second period, which will commence with the resurrection of the dead, will be completely miraculous.

FIRST PERIOD:

5. **Rambam Laws of Kings Ch. 12:** “It should not occur to you that during the days of the Messiah a single thing from the “ways of the world” will be canceled nor will there be something novel in the Creation. Rather, the world will continue in its customary way.
6. Our Sages have said that there is no difference between This World and the Days of the Messiah except (our) subservience to the kingdoms of the world alone. From the plain meaning of the words of the prophets we understand that at the beginning of the days of the Messiah there will be the War of Gog and Magog. Before the War of Gog and Magog, a prophet will arise to correct Israel and prepare their hearts.

7. During the days of King Messiah, when he will be secure in his monarchy, and all of Israel will gather about him, everyone's genealogy will be clarified by him by means of the Holy Spirit which will rest upon him...
8. The Sages and the Prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah because they wanted to rule the world or because they wanted to have dominion over the non-Jews or because they wanted the nations to exalt them or because they wanted to eat, drink and be merry. Rather, they desired this so that they would have time for Torah and its Wisdom. And there would be no one who would oppress them or force them to be idle (from Torah). This, in order that they may merit the World to Come, as we have explained regarding the Laws of Repentance.
9. At that time there will be no famines and no wars, no envy and no competition. For the Good will be very pervasive. All the delicacies will be as readily available as is dust. The world will only be engaged in knowing G-d. Then, there will be very wise people who will understand the deep, sealed matters. They will then achieve knowledge of the Creator to as high a degree as humanly possible."
10. People will live for many years and will be "decommissioned" from life when their time is up.
11. One of the most important aspects of the Messianic Redemption is the promised ingathering of the exiles from the Diaspora.
12. The Torah makes reference to this expected expansion of the land of Israel.
13. During the Messianic Era, Israel will be divided into thirteen sections—unlike the original partition of the Land, when it was divided amongst the twelve tribes. The thirteenth section will be the personal domain of Moshiach and his offspring.

SECOND PERIOD:

1. The Resurrection of the Dead – an era that will last for all eternity – is the second and final stage of the Messianic Era. It will happen forty years after the advent of the Messianic Era.
2. Every Jewish soul that ever lived will be resurrected—in the very body in which it lived and died (and in the case of reincarnated souls, all the bodies will be resurrected). The body and soul are partners in all good deeds performed; they must *both* be rewarded accordingly.
3. Immediately before the resurrection, all those who are alive at that time will momentarily die, and then instantaneously be resurrected. This short death serves a spiritual purpose—it will cleanse the souls of all traces of the imperfect and tainted world it inhabited. They will then rise with a clean and pure slate.
4. The Resurrection Era will be a period that will be characterized by radical changes in nature, with miracles becoming the daily norm. We will then be treated to a reward that can only be viewed as a gift from Above, for its greatness is such that finite human efforts could never earn such bounty.

Summary of the order of the Messianic redemption:

- Moshiach comes and rebuilds the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.
- The ingathering of all the exiles will then follow.
- The resurrection of the dead will occur forty years after the exiles return to the Land of Israel.

- *Tzaddikim*, the saintly righteous men and women of the generations, are an exception to this rule; they will be resurrected immediately with the arrival of Moshiach.
- First the dead who are buried in Israel will rise from their graves, they will be followed by the dead of the Diaspora, followed by the generation that left Egypt and died in the desert.
- Last of all will rise the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Their resurrection is postponed so that they should have the *nachas* of waking to find all their children alive, well, and happy.
- The categories mentioned above will also be further subdivided. The more righteous individuals will be resurrected before the general population. Amongst these righteous individuals, those who were primarily preoccupied with Torah study will take precedence over those whose forte was mitzvah observance.

QUESTIONS FROM LAST WEEK:

1. Why didn't the Rambam make one of his 13 Principles of Faith, to believe in Olam Haba? The Rambam includes the resurrection of the dead and Moshiach, but no mention of Olam Haba.
2. My understanding of Chovos Halvavos is that our actions in this world should be focused uniquely on preparing for Olam Haba. However, we are in a constant battle with the Yetzer Hora not to get a better Olam Haba, but solely to serve Hashem in this world. Aren't these two somewhat contradictory?
3. How does a person convert if they were not born with a Jewish Soul ?