



**DEATH & THE AFTERLIFE
PART I: THE SOUL**

Source Sheet by Rabbi Jonathan Leener

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Death as Homecoming"

Our first question is to what end and upon what right do we think about the strange and totally inaccessible subject of death? The answer is because of the supreme certainty we have about the existence of man: that it cannot endure without a sense of meaning. But existence embraces both life and death, and in a way death is the test of the meaning of life. If death is devoid of meaning, then life is absurd. Life's ultimate meaning remains obscure unless it is reflected upon in the face of death...

Is death nothing but an obliteration, an absolute negation? This view of death is affected by our understanding of life. If life is sensed as a surprise, as a gift, defying explanation, then death ceases to be a radical, absolute negation of what life stands for. For both life and death are aspects of a greater mystery, the mystery of being, the mystery of creation. Over and above the preciousness of particular existence stand the marvel of its being related to the infinite mystery of being or creation. Death, then, is not simply man's coming to an end. It also entering a beginning. There is, furthermore, the mystery of my person existence. The problem of how and whether I am going to be after I die is profoundly related to the problem of who and how I was before I was born. The mystery of an afterlife is related to the mystery of preexistence. A soul does not grow out of nothing. Does it, then, perish and dissolve in nothing?

Genesis 2:7-8

(7) 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. (8) The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.

בראשית ב':ז-ח'

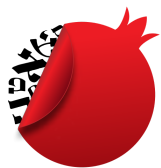
(ז) וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגַפְשׁ חַיָּה: (ח) וַיֹּטֵעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן־עֵדֶן מִמְּקוֹם וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר:

Rashi on Genesis 2:7:3

ויפח באפיו AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS — He made him of both, of earthly and of heavenly matter: the body of the earthly, and the soul of the heavenly.(Genesis Rabbah 12:8).

רש"י על בראשית ב':ז':ג'

ויפח באפיו. עשאו מן התחתונים ומן העליונים, גוף מן התחתונים ונשמה מן העליונים.



Ramban on Genesis 2:7:1

AND HE BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE. This alludes to the superiority of the soul, its foundation and secret, since it mentions in connection with it the full Divine Name. And the verse says that He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life in order to inform us that the soul did not come to man from the elements, as He intimated concerning the soul of moving things, nor was it an evolvement from the Separate Intelligences. Rather, it was the spirit of the Great G-d: *out of his mouth cometh knowledge and discernment*. For he who breathes into the nostrils of another person gives into him something from his own soul. It is this which Scripture says, *And the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding*, since the soul is from the foundation of *binah* (understanding) by way of truth and faith.

רמב"ן על בראשית ב':ז:א'

וַיִּפֶחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים יִרְמוּז לָנוּ הַכְּתוּב הַזֶּה מֵעֵלַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ יְסוּדָה וְסוּדָה כִּי הַזְכוּר בֵּה שֵׁם מֵלֵא וְאָמַר כִּי הוּא נִפְחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים לְהוֹדִיעַ כִּי לֹא בָאָה בּוּ מִן הַיְסוּדוֹת כְּאֲשֶׁר רָמַז בְּנִפְחַשׁ הַתְּנוּעָה (בְּרֵאשִׁית א':כ') גַּם לֹא בְהִשְׁתַּלְשְׁלוֹת מִן הַשְּׂכֵלִים הַנִּבְדָּלִים אֲבָל הִיא רוּחַ הַשֵּׁם הַגָּדוֹל מִפִּי דַעַת וְתִבּוּנָה כִּי הַנּוֹפֵחַ בְּאִפֵּי אַחַר מִנְשַׁמְתוֹ יִתֵּן בּוּ וְזֶהוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (אִיּוֹב ל"ב ח) וְנְשָׁמַת שְׂדֵי תְּבִינָם כִּי הִיא מִיְסוּד הַבִּינָה בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת וְאִמּוּנָה.

Rabbi Moshe ben Shem Tov de Leon, 7

God has a tree of flowering souls in Paradise. The angel who sits beneath it is the Guardian of Paradise, and the tree is surrounded by the four winds of the world. From this tree blossom forth all souls, as it is said, "I am like a cypress tree in bloom; your fruit issues forth from me." (Hosea 14:9). And from the roots of this tree sprout the souls of all the righteous ones whose names are inscribed there. When the souls grow ripe, they descend into the Treasury of Souls, where they are stored until they are called upon to be born. From this we learn that all souls are the fruit of the Holy One, blessed be He. This Tree of Souls produces all the souls that have ever existed, or will ever exist. And when the last soul descends, the world as we know it will come to an end.

Tanya, Part I; Likkutei Amarim 2:1

(1) The second soul in Israel is truly "a part of God above," as it is written: "and he blew into his nostrils a soul of life"(Genesis 2:7); "And You blew it into me." (Siddur, Morning Prayer). It is written in the Zohar "he Who blows, blows from within him," that is to say, from his inwardness and from his innermost being. For it is of his inward and innermost vitality that a man emits through blowing with force.

תניא, חלק ראשון, ספר של בינונים ב':א'

(א) ונפש השניית בישראל היא חלק אלוה ממעל ממש, כמו שכתוב: "ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים" (בראשית ב', ז), ו"אתה נפחתה בי" (ברכת אלהי נשמה), וכמו שכתוב בזוהר: "מאן דנפח מתוכיה נפח", פירוש, מתוכיותו ומפנימיותו, שתוכיות ופנימיות החיות שבאדם מוציא בנפחתו בכח.



Likutei Moharan 260:1:1-4

The name is the soul, as has been explained in the lesson “A Chamber of Holiness”; see there. This is the aspect of “a living soul is its name” (Genesis 2:19) ; see the aforementioned lesson. Self-sacrifice is in this category, as in the case of the Ten Martyrs who sacrificed their souls sanctifying God’s Name in order to unite the Holy One and His *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence). As is known, the main unification is by means of self-sacrifice. And in those generations they saw that it was impossible to rectify and perform unifications Above except by means of their souls. They therefore sacrificed their souls sanctifying God’s Name. The reason is that when the souls ascend above by means of self-sacrifice, they return to the *Shekhinah* whence they came. This is because Israel is literally “a portion of God from above” (Job 31:2), for they are literally portions of the *Shekhinah*, in the aspect of “who have been carried since the belly” (Isaiah 46:3). And when they return to the *Shekhinah*, the *Shekhinah* then takes pride [in them]: “See what a child I have come to You with” (Zohar III, 13a). Then, supernal yearning is aroused and a unification transpires, as is known. Occasionally, this necessitates that people die, God forbid; a considerable number of Jewish souls are killed, God forbid, so that there can be a unification by means of their souls ascending above. For, occasionally, very many souls are required, God forbid, and as a result it happens that people die, God forbid.

ליקוטי מוהר"ן ר"ס:א'א'-ד'

השם הוא הנפש, כמו שמבאר בהתורה "היכל הקדוש" (בסימן נט), עין שם. בבחינת (בראשית ב' י"ט): נפש חיה הוא שמו, עין שם. ויש בבחינה זו מסירת נפש. כי יש עשרה הרוגי מלכות, שמסרו נפשם על קדוש השם, בשביל יהודי קדושא בריהו הוא ושכינתה, כידוע, שעקר היחוד על-ידי מסירת נפש, והם ראו באומן הדורות, שאי אפשר לתקן ולעשות יחודים למעלה כי אם על ידי נשמותיהם, על כן מסרו נפשם על קדוש השם, כי כשהנפשות עולות למעלה על-ידי מסירת נפש, אזי הם חוזרים להשכינה, כי משם יצאו, כי ישראל הם חלק אלוה ממעל ממש, שהם חלקי השכינה ממש, בבחינת: העמסים מני בטן (ישעיהו מ"ג); וכשהם חוזרים להשכינה, אזי השכינה מתפארת: חזי כמה ברא קאתינא לגבך (זוהר ויקרא דף יג), ואזי מתעורר השתוקקות עליון, ונעשה יחוד, כידוע. ולפעמים בא לצרף זה הריגה, חס ושלום, שנהרגו, חס ושלום, כמה וכמה נפשות מישראל, כדי שיהיה יחוד על-ידי נפשותיהם העולות למעלה, כי לפעמים צריך אלו היחוד הרבה נפשות מאד, חס ושלום, על כן בא הריגה, חס ושלום:

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Thirteen Petalled Rose

The human soul, from its lowest to its highest levels, is a unique and single entity, even though it is many-faceted. In its profoundest being, the soul of man is a part of the Divine and, in this respect, is a manifestation of God in the world...Indeed, only man, by virtue of his divine soul, has the potential, and some of the actual capacity, of God Himself. This potential expresses itself as the ability to go beyond the limits of a given existence, to move freely, and choose other paths,



enabling man to reach the utmost heights – or to plumb the deepest hells. It is, in other words, the power to will and create. Man's free will thus derives its unique potential from the fact that it is a part of the divine will, without limit and without restriction. Man's creative power is also derived from the same divine power to create things that never existed before, to destroy things already in existence, and to fashion new forms. In this sense, too, man is made in the image of God.

...In spite of all the bonds uniting the individual soul either with a higher source or with every other soul, each particular spark, each individual soul, is unique and special, in terms of its essence, its capacity, and what is demanded of it. No two souls coincide in their actions their functions, and their paths. No one soul can take the place of another, and even the greatest of the great cannot fill the special role, the particular place, of another that may be the smallest of the small. For this notion, incidentally, derives Judaism's profound respect for human life. The life of a person is something that has no possible substitute or exchange; nothing and no one can take its place.

Genesis 25:8

And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin.

בראשית כ"ה:ח'

וַיָּגַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה וְקָדַם וַיִּשְׁבַּע וַיֹּאסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

Sforno on Genesis 25:8:2

ויאסף אל עמיו, he was attached to the bundle of souls who are part of the life after death, all of whom the righteous of the various generations who were like him in lifestyle, [as in those regions biological relationships are irrelevant, and the term “his people” is applied to other common denominators than on earth. Ed.] The reason why the Torah employs the term עמיו his peoples” in the plural is that there are all kinds of different spiritual levels among the righteous souls, not all attained the same level of righteousness while on earth although all of them share the experience of enjoying eternal life. (compare statements in Baba Batra 75 on that subject.)

ספורנו על בראשית כ"ה:ח':ב'

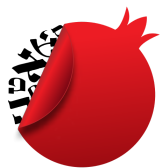
ויאסף אל עמיו נאסף אל צרור החיים לחיי העולם עם צדיקי הדורות שהם עמיו ודומים אליו ואמרו עמיו בלשון רכים כי אמנם רב ההבדל בין הצדיקים במעלה עם היותם כולם זוכים לחיי עולם כאמרם ז"ל (שבת פרק שואל) וכל אחד נכוה מחופתו של חברו: חסלת פרשת חיי שרה

Genesis 49:29-33

(29) Then he instructed them, saying to them, “I am about to be gathered to my kin.

בראשית מ"ט:כ"ט-ל"ג

(כט) וַיִּצְו אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֹאסֵף אֶל־עַמִּי קָבְרוּ אֹתִי אֶל־אֲבֹתַי אֶל־הַמַּעְרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵדֵה עֶפְרוֹן הַחֲתָנִי: (ל) בַּמַּעְרָה



Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, (30) the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site— (31) there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah— (32) the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites.” (33) When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי־מַמְרֵא בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשְּׂדֵה מֵאֵת עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי לְאַחֲזַת־קֶבֶר: (ל"א) שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־אֲבֹרָהֶם וְאֶת שָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת רֵבֶקָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וְשָׁמָּה קָבַרְתִּי אֶת־לֵאָה: (ל"ב) מִקְנֵה הַשְּׂדֵה וְהַמַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חִת: (ל"ג) וְכָל יַעֲקֹב לְצֹנֹת אֶת־בְּנָיו וַיֹּאסֶף רַגְלָיו אֶל־הַמַּטָּה וַיִּגָּע וַיֹּאסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

Rashi on Genesis 49:29:1

נאסף אל עמי [I AM] TO BE GATHERED UNTO MY PEOPLE — The expression נאסף “gathered” is used here because the souls are taken into a place in heaven where they are to be laid by. אסף in the Hebrew language has sometimes the meaning of “bringing something in to a place where it is to be kept” as e.g., (Judges 19:15) “For there was no man that took them into his house (אסף) [to lodge]”; (Deuteronomy 22:2) “then thou shalt bring it home (ואספתו) into thy house”; (Leviticus 23:39) “when you have taken in (באספתם) the fruit of the land” — which means bringing them in to the barn on account of the rain; (Exodus 23:16) “when thou hast taken in (באספת) thy labours”. So, too, the verb אסף used in connection with death always means “bringing in to the place where the souls are to be laid by”.

רש"י על בראשית מ"ט:כ"ט:א'

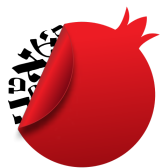
נאסף אל עמי. על שם שמכניסין הנפשות אל מקום גניזתן, שיש אסיפה בלשון עברי שהיא לשון הכנסה, כגון ואין איש מאסף אותי הביתה (שופטים י"ט), ואספתו אל תוך ביתך (דברים כ"ב), באסףכם את תבואת הארץ (ויקרא כ"ג), הכנסתם לבית מפני הגשמים, באסףך את מעשיך (שמות כ"ג), וכל אסיפה האמורה במיתה אף היא לשון הכנסה:

Genesis 35:28-29

(28) Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old (29) when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

בראשית ל"ה:כ"ח-כ"ט

(כח) ויהיו ימי יצחק מאת שנה ושמונים שנה: (כט) ויגוע יצחק ולימתו ויאסף אל עמיו וקו ושבע ימים ויקברו אתו ועשו ויעקב בניו: (פ)



Genesis 3:19

By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground—
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.”

בראשית ג' י"ט

בְּזֵעַת אֲפִידֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עֵד וְשׁוֹבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ
כִּי־עֵפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עֵפָר תָּשׁוּב:

I Samuel 25:29

And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the LORD; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.

שמואל א כ"ה:כ"ט

וַיִּקָּם אָדָם לְרִדְפָךָ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ וְהָיְתָה נַפְשִׁי
צָרוּרָה | בְּצָרוּר הַחַיִּים אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֵת נַפְשׁ אֲבִיךָ
מִקִּלְעוֹנָה בְּתוֹךְ כַּף הַקַּלָּע:

Ecclesiastes 12:7

And the dust returns to the ground
As it was,
And the lifebreath returns to God
Who bestowed it.

קהלת י"ב:ז'

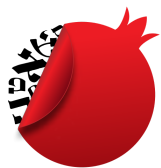
וַיָּשׁוּב הָעֵפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהַרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר
נָתַןָּהּ:

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 34:9

All the seven days of mourning the soul goeth forth and returneth from its (former) home to its sepulchral abode, and from its sepulchral abode to its (former) home. After the seven days of mourning the body || begins to breed worms, and it decays and returns to the dust, as it originally was, as it is said, "And the dust returns to the earth as it was" (Eccles. 12:7). The soul goes forth and returns to the place whence it was given, from heaven, as it is said, "And the soul returns unto God who gave it" (*ibid.*). And whence do we learn that the soul has been given from heaven? Come and see. When the Holy One, blessed be He, formed man, he did not have in him the spirit. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He breathed with the spirit of the breath of His mouth, and cast a soul into him, as it is said, "And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"

פרקי דרבי אליעזר ל"ד:ט'

שבעת ימי האבל מתחיל הגוף להתליע רמה וחוזר הגוף לעפר כשהיה, שנאמר (קהלת יב, ז) וישב העפר על הארץ כשהיה. ומניין אנו למדין שהנפש נתנה מן השמים, בא וראה כשיצר הב"ה את האדם מה עשה, נשם את פיו ונזרקה בו נשמה, שנ' ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים.



(Gen. 2:7).

Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah 4:9

The form of this soul is not a combination of the fundamental [elements] into which it will ultimately decompose, nor does it come from the *neshamah* so that it would require the *neshamah*, as the *neshamah* requires the body. Rather, it is from God, from heaven. Therefore, when the matter [of the body], which is a combination of the fundamental [elements], decomposes, and the *neshamah* ceases to exist - for [the *neshamah*] exists only together with the body and requires the body for all its deeds - this form will not be cut off, for this form does not require the *neshamah* for its deeds. Rather, it knows and comprehends knowledge which is above matter, knows the Creator of all things, and exists forever. In his wisdom, Solomon [gave this description (Ecclesiastes 12:7)]: "The dust will return to the Earth as it [originally] was, and the *ruach* will return to God who granted it."

משנה תורה, הלכות יסודי התורה ד'ט'

אין צורת הנפש הזאת מחברת מן היסודות כדי שתפרד להם, ואינה מכח הנשמה עד שתהא צריכה לנשמה כמו שהנשמה צריכה לגוף. אלא מאת ה' מן השמים היא. לפיכך כשיפרד הגלם שהוא מחבר מן היסודות ותאבד הנשמה מפני שאינה מצויה אלא עם הגוף וצריכה לגוף בכל מעשיה לא תפרת הצורה הזאת. לפי שאינה צריכה לנשמה במעשיה. אלא יודעת ומשגת הדעות הפרודות מן הגלמים יודעת בורא הכל ועומדת לעולם ולעולמי עולמים. הוא שאמר שלמה ברחמיו (קהלת יב ז) "וישב העפר על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה":