

**THE SOUL'S JOURNEY:
DEATH AND AFTERLIFE
IN KABBALAH AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

REB SIMCHA RAPHAEL, PH.D.

OneSpirit
learning alliance

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 **דעת DA'AT INSTITUTE**
DEATH AWARENESS, ADVOCACY *and* TRAINING

This weekend's workshop is not about death. It is about life. Life and death co-exist, and we are not free to live fully unless we address our fears of death and the denial of our grief. Until we uncover the layers of hidden grief and pain, we will continue to live in the shadow of our full self, somewhat disconnected from our vitality and joy. When we understand death, we understand life as it truly is, and we experience the glory, the wonder, the beauty, the pain and the mystery of spirit embodied in matter

Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.
drsimcha@daatinstitute.net
215.432.1211

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

SESSION 1 — SATURDAY 9:30 AM -12:30 PM

INTRODUCTION/IN-WOMB AND PRE-BIRTH EXPERIENCE

Overview of workshop content and goals

The Nature of the Soul in Kabbalah and Tibetan Buddhism

The In-Womb/Pre-birth Experience

MEDITATION - Sensing the Destiny of Our Life in the Womb

SESSION 2 — SATURDAY 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

DYING AND THE DEATH-MOMENT

Language of Death and Dying in Contemporary Culture and Hasidism

Bardo Thodol in Tibetan Culture

(From The Tibetan Book of the Dead A Way of Life (1994)

Narrated by Leonard Cohen)

Transit Stage #1

Chikai Bardo/Hibbut HaKever —“Pangs of the Grave”

Deathbed Visions in Tibetan Buddhism and Kabbalah

MEDITATION - Encountering Our Own Images of Death

SESSION 3 — SUNDAY 9:30 AM -12:30 PM

AFTERLIFE AND THE POST-MORTEM JOURNEY

Contemporary Context of Death Care Today

Transit Stage #2

Chonyi Bardo/Deathbed Visions in Kabbalah

Visions of Peaceful and Wrathful Dieties

Gehenna and Gan Eden

MEDITATION - Encounter with Loved Ones in the World Beyond

SESSION 4 — SUNDAY 2:00 PM -5:00 PM

GILGUL AND REINCARNATION

From the What to the So What?

Pastoral Application of Afterlife Teachings

Transit Stage #3

Sipai Bardo of Seeking ReBirth

Gilgul in Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah

MEDITATION - Exploring a Past Life Experience

WORKSHOP GOALS/LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1) To investigate both *philosophically and experientially teachings on the journey of the soul*—birth, death, afterlife and reincarnation—in two separate and distinct religious traditions—Vajrayana Buddhism and Kabbalah.**
- 2) To utilize these teachings as a way to *explore your own issues and experiences around death and grief* so you can be more adequately prepared to deal with bereavement issues that emerge in your personal, family and professional life.**
- 3) To continue to grow your sense of *being agents of transformation in the emerging “death positive” culture.***



I. IN-WOMB AND PRE-BIRTH EXPERIENCE

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 day you were born is the day G-D decided the world could not exist without you" - Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

COSMIC VISION OF THE FETUS IN THE 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 [Talmud Niddah 30b]

SIPAI BARDO - PREPARING FOR REBIRTH

Hey noble one! Thus, if it becomes necessary by the power of evolution to enter the womb, you should now rely on the instruction for choosing the womb. Listen! Do not go just to any womb door that presents itself... Since now you have the subtle clairvoyance, you will be able to understand the nature of all places, so choose your place of rebirth wisely... [Thurman, p. 191]

KABBALISTIC MIDRASH - ANGELS IN THE WOMB

What is the mystery of the Formation of the Embryo? In the hour when man is in service of his bed with his wife the Holy Blessed One beckons God beckons the angel in charge of souls and says, 'Bring me a certain spirit which is hidden in Gan 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 a drop of seed, 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 (spirit) and leads them into GAN EDEN and shows them the righteous who sit in glory. 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 (spirit) and leads him into the GEHENNA, and shows him the wicked whom the angels of destruction 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 its mother's womb 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. (*Midrash Yetzirat HaVlad*)



2. DYING AND THE DEATH-MOMENT

TRANSIT STAGE I - SEPARATION FROM PHYSICAL BODY

HIBBUT HAKEVER/“PANGS OF THE GRAVE”/CHIKAI BARDO

PRE-COGNIZANCE OF ONE'S DEATH

When one's appointed time draws near, proclamation is made concerning him for thirty days, and even the birds of the heaven announce his doom; and if he is virtuous, his coming is announced for thirty days among the righteous in Gan Eden. We have learnt that during those thirty days his soul departs from him every night and ascends to the other world and sees its place there, and during those thirty days the man has not the same consciousness or control of his soul as previously (*Zohar I, 217b*).

DEATHBED VISIONS - SUPERNAL VISION

When a person lies [on their deathbed] and judgement rests upon them decreeing that they should leave this world, they are granted an additional supernal spirit that they never had before. And when this dwells within him, they see what they have seen throughout their life... And once this has been granted, and they see, they depart from this world (*Zohar I, 218b*).

HIBBUT HA-KEVER - “PANGS OF THE GRAVE”

Rabbi Yehuda said: “for seven days the soul goes to and fro from the house to the grave from the grave to the house, mourning for the body” (*Zohar I, 218b*)

CHIKAI BARDO - THE BARDO OF THE PROCESS OF DYING

O noble one, after being unconscious for four and a half days, you will move on, and awakening from your faint you will wonder what has happened to you, so recognize it as the bardo state. (*Trungpa and Fremantle, p. 41*)

The lifetime of the bardo person usually lasts for seven days, although in some cases it is even shorter than this. If in this time they not found a suitable place of rebirth, they experiences a 'small' death and is reborn in the bardo again. [*Tsong Khapa, Commentary to the Six Yogas of Naropa*]

DEATHBED VISIONS - ANCESTRAL GUIDES - FAMILIAL BEINGS

Rabbi Shimon said: 'Have you seen today the image of your father or your mother? For so we have learnt, that at the hour of a person's departure from the world, their father or mother and other relatives gather round, and they see them and recognize them, and likewise all with whom they had associated with in this world, and they accompany their soul to the place where it is to abide. (Zohar I, 218a).

Kindred souls gravitate toward each other spontaneously, as it were, for with each other they feel as though they are with their own family, at home. When they are with kindred souls, they enjoy the fullest freedom and find life totally delightful. [Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, 44]

Souls newly arrived from the world... come into the society in which they had been while they lived in the body, [and] are led about by angels to many mansions or abodes...[Swedenborg, Arcana Celestia, 1273]

DEATHBED VISIONS - MYTHIC BEINGS

When a person departs this world they see Adam, the first man, sitting at the gate of the Gan Eden, ready to welcome all who have observed the commands of their Master. (Zohar, Noah, 65b) ...no one leaves the world before seeing the *Shekhinah*....(Zohar, Emor, 88a) ... and with the *Shekhinah* there come three ministering angels to receive the soul of the righteous (I, 98a Midrash ha-Ne'elam).

O Noble one, meditate on your yidam [Archetype deity] and do not be distracted. Concentrate immensely on your yidam, visualize him as an appearance without substance of its own... Meditate on the Lord of Compassion. (Thurman, p. 128).

DEATHBED VISIONS - LIFE REVIEW

When God desires to take back a man's spirit, all the days they have lived in this world pass in review (Zohar, I, 221b)

Soon after departure from the physical body the individual]...sees and now understands himself as he is, unadorned by flattery or self-deception. He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the suffering that has overtaken him. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 162.

DEATHBED VISIONS - ANGEL (GOD) OF DEATH/JUDGEMENT

"In harmony with their inheritance from India, [Tibetans envision death] as the ferocious, terrifying God of Death, Yama, king of the underworld and judge of the dead. He is portrayed as blue-black in color, with a buffalo head and two arms, holding a white spinal-column-and-skull club and a noose, phallus erect, standing naked on the back of a fire-breathing buffalo.... He has numberless hordes of minions who do his bidding and roam around collecting the souls of the dying. When he comes to call, a person cannot say no, they must go down with him to the underworld. And there in his iron hall that is windowless and doorless, their good and evil deeds are weighed in the balance. Yama judges them and then sends them on, to the various heavenly realms if their virtue predominates, to the animal and hellish realms if their sins predominate....(Thurman, pp. 18-19).

DEATHBED VISIONS - MYTHIC VISIONS OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

At the time of a person's death three ministering angels appear, one the Angel of Death, one a scribe, and a third who is appointed to accompany them. They say: "Arise, for your end has come." Then the scribe proceeds to number the person's days and years. At that moment the person opens their eyes and sees the Angel of Death, whose length extends from one end of the world to the other; From the sole of the angel's foot to the crown of the angel's head they are (he is) full of eyes, their clothing of fire, surrounded by fire, they are all fire. In their hand is a fiery blade, from which hangs a bitter drop. Masekhet Hibbut Ha-Kever. I

DISSOLUTION OF ELEMENTS IN ZOHAR

..we have learnt that on the dread day when a man's time comes to depart from the world, four quarters of the world indict him, and punishments rise up from all four quarters and four elements fall to quarreling and seek to depart each to its own side. (Zohar I, 218b).

DISSOLUTION OF ELEMENTS IN BARDO THODOL

Life depends on the interaction of four basic elements: The essence of earth is flesh, the essence of water is bodily fluid, the essence of fire is bodily heat and the essence of air is breath. The dying process begins with the dissolution of these elements.

[First] the element earth dissolves and is absorbed by the element water. This is accompanied by the inner experience that...everything is falling apart from great floods and earthquakes. You will not be able to stand because your strength is fast disappearing...

In the second phase, the element water dissolves and is absorbed by the element fire... you will experience the sensation that the entire universe has been flooded with water. During this time, those around you perceive that your face and lips are rapidly drying up. You will also feel extremely thirsty.

When the third element, fire, dissolves into the element air you... will experience the sensation that everything around you is burning. During this time the heat from your body will do away.

[Finally] the element air will begin to dissolve into consciousness itself. When this happens, you will have the... experience that all phenomena in the universe are being blown away by the winds of a great storm. You will hear a grinding roar like that of a thousand thunders [and] ... the external air or breath will be extinguished.

[Lama Lodru, Bardo Teachings - Tibetan Way of Death and Rebirth, pp. 3-5]

STAGES OF THE POST-MORTEM JOURNEY

DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN BEING	TRANSIT STAGES	TIBETAN BARDOS	KABBALAH	PROCESS OF AFTERLIFE
SPIRIT 	TRANSIT STAGE III	SIPAI BARDOS PREPARE FOR REBIRTH	TZROR HA-HAYYIM SOURCE OF LIFE	SPIRITUAL UNIFICATION
MIND 	TRANSIT STAGE II	PEACEFUL DIETIES CHONYI BARDOS	GAN EDEN HEAVENLY BLISS	INTELLECTUAL CONTEMPLATION
EMOTION 		WRATHFUL DIETIES	GEHENNA EMOTIONAL PURGATION	EMOTIONAL PURGATION
BODY 	TRANSIT STAGE I	CHIKAI BARDOS DYING PROCESS LEAVING THE BODY	HIBBUT HAKEVER PANGS OF THE GRAVE <small>ANCESTRAL GUIDES MYTHIC BEINGS LIFE REVIEW DISSOLUTION OF ELEMENTS</small>	PHYSICAL SEPARATION

3. AFTERLIFE AND THE POST-MORTEM JOURNEY

TRANSIT STAGE II - CHONYI BARDO - THE BARDO OF DHARMATA

The luminous Bardo of Dharmata follows after the painful Bardo of Dying. Buddhism asserts that in this Bardo, the nature of mind is laid bare.

Andrew Holecek, Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies

TRANSIT STAGE II - CHONYI BARDO - "EXPERIENCING REALITY" PEACEFUL & WRATHFUL DEITIES

[Bardo deities] are not gods in the traditional sense. They are not to be relegated to any heavenly or under-worldly realms of spatial dimensions, nor are they mythological figures...(or) forms of emanation of a god or his hierarchical order. They are also not a theophany but a psychic reality, which occurs as images in the inner space of human awareness and also out from this (as projections). Therefore they are called 'illusory images of one's mind'.

Now when the bardo of the dharmata [Chonyi Bardo) dawns upon me I will abandon all thoughts of fear and terror, I will recognize whatever appears as **my projections and know it to be a vision of the bardo**; now that I have reached this crucial point I will not fear the peaceful and wrathful ones, they are my own projections. (Trungpa and Fremantle, p. 40)

On the ninth day the Lord Vajra Heruka will arise before you, emerging from within your brain. He is dark blue, with three faces, six arms, and four legs stretched out. His front face is dark blue, his right face white, his left face red. His right hand holds a vajra, the middle a skull bowl, and the third a plowshare. They rise manifestly before you, having emerged from within your own brain! Do not fear them! Do not be terrified! Recognize them as an image of your own awareness! They are your own Archetype Deity, so do not panic! The very moment you recognize them you will be liberated! (Thurman, p. 155)

GEHENNA - PURGATION

There are five kinds of punishments in Gehenna, and Isaiah saw them all.... He entered the 2nd compartment, and he saw two men hanging by their tongues; and he said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." He answered, "These are the men who slandered, therefore they are thus punished." He entered the 3rd compartment, and he saw there men hanging by their organs. He said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." And He answered, "These are the men who neglected their own wives, and committed adultery with the daughters of Israel." (*Keitzad Din Ha-Kever*, 1-3).

GAN EDEN - THE HEAVENLY PARADISE

Gan Eden has two gates of carbuncle, and sixty myriads of ministering angels keep watch. Each of these angels shine like the radiance of the heavens. When the righteous person approaches, angels remove from him the clothes in which he had been buried, and clothe him with eight robes of the clouds of glory, and place upon his head two crowns, one of precious stones and pearls, and the other of gold, and they place eight myrtles in his hand and praise him. And they lead him to a place full of waters surrounded by 800 species of roses and myrtles. (*Masekhet Gan Eden*, 1-2)

MOVEMENT FROM LOWER GAN EDEN TO UPPER GAN EDEN

A second ordeal has to be undergone by the soul on its passage from Lower Gan Eden to Upper Gan Eden; for while in Lower Gan Eden it is not yet entirely purged of the materialities of this world, so as to be fit to ascend on high. They thus pass it through the "river of light" from which it emerges completely purified and so come before the presence of the Master of the universe purified in every aspect... This is its final stage. At that stage the souls stand garbed in their raiment and adorned in their crowns before their Master. (Zohar II, 211b)

4. TRANSIT STAGE #3 - SIPAI BARDO, TZROR HA-HAYYIM GILGUL AND REINCARNATION

TZROR HA-HAYYIM/RETURN TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE

...in the same way as the soul has to be clothed in a bodily garment in order to exist in this world, so is she given an ethereal supernal garment to exist in the other world, and to be enabled to gaze at the effulgence of life radiating from that holy celestial abode, the "source of life - *Tzror HaHayyim*" (Zohar, I, 66a).

SIPAI BARDO/PREPARING FOR REBIRTH

Hey noble one! Thus, if it becomes necessary by the power of evolution to enter the womb, you should now rely on the instruction for choosing the womb. Listen! Do not go just to any womb door that presents itself... Since now you have the subtle clairvoyance, you will be able to understand the nature of all places, so choose your place of rebirth wisely... [Thurman, p. 191]

PAST LIFE RECALL - FRUITS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

"With his mind made pure, serene, devoid of evil... he directs and inclines it to recollection of his manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many aeons of cosmic contraction and expansion, [recollecting], 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-rose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life... The monk recollects his manifold past lives... in their modes and details. Samannaphala Sutta, Pali Canon, c. 1st cent. CE

REASONS FOR REINCARNATION

REINCARNATION AS ATONEMENT FOR SIN/KARMIC RECTIFICATION

The sins of [a righteous person] must be cleared so that he will be able to enter Gan Eden. Thus, there is no rectification for him except reincarnation. For every sin which he does not atone through suffering during his lifetime, and for which he cannot go to Gehenna to receive his punishment for them, he will require another reincarnation to rectify it. (Sha'ar HaGilgullim, Winston trans, p. 113)

REINCARNATION FOR THE SAKE OF FULFILLING MITZVOTH

Rabbi Shimon said to them, friends [students, disciples] the time has come to reveal some mysteries concerning transmigration of souls. This applies when the soul is required to reincarnate, either because of sins, or because it had not completely fulfilled obligations in Torah and *mitzvot* while alive in this world. It is forced to come back to this world and don a body, that is be born again and finish what was imposed on it for the seventy years of the life in this world. (Zohar II, 94b)

PAST INCARNATION EXPERIENCES - REINCARNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE PSYCHE

Past-incarnation experiences consist of fragments of scenes, individual events, or entire, rather clear and logical sequences occurring at another place and time in history... one experiences one's self in another form, another place and time... confronted with a memory, of reliving something that one has already seen and experienced. Stanislav Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious*, pp. 173-174

REASONS FOR REINCARNATION - NESHAMA KLALIT - "UNIVERSAL SOUL"

There is a soul that is called the "universal soul" [Reb Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, Ch. 2 and 42]. This soul is connected to all souls, and can also reincarnate solely for the purpose of helping other souls achieve their proper elevation. A universal soul has responsibility for all souls, being that it is connected with all souls. When this "universal soul" reincarnates to help other people reach their elevations, it is guaranteed that this elevated soul will not sin and will be inclined to do only good. (DovBer Pinson, *Reincarnation and Judaism*, p. 103)

DA'AT INSTITUTE FOR DEATH AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND TRAINING

is dedicated to providing death awareness education and professional development training. Working in consultation with synagogues, churches, hospice programs and other types of community organizations, **DA'AT INSTITUTE** offers:

1. **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS** on death, dying, bereavement and the spirituality of end-of-life issues and concerns;
2. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING** to clergy, health care and mental health professionals and educators working with the dying and bereaved;
3. **BEREAVEMENT AND HOSPICE COUNSELING SERVICES** to individuals and families through counseling, professional referral and bereavement support groups;
4. **PRINTED AND AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES** on the various facets of dealing with grief and loss, and on the spirituality of death and afterlife and
5. **RITUALS OF TRANSITION** for dying, burial, bereavement, unveiling and memorialization, helping families create meaningful rituals of passage.

Simcha Raphael, Ph.D. is Founding Director of the DAAT Institute for Death Awareness, Advocacy and Training. He has served as Adjunct Professor in the Departments of Religion of LaSalle University, Temple University, and in the Aleph Ordination Program, and is Faculty in the One Spirit Seminary Art of Dying Institute. He works as a transpersonal psychotherapist and bereavement counselor, in Philadelphia, and is also a Fellow of the Rabbis Without Borders network. Ordained as a Pastoral Rabbi by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, he is author of numerous publications on death and afterlife including the groundbreaking *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*. His website is www.daatinstitute.net.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.
drsimcha@daatinstitute.net
www.daatinstitute.net
www.transpersonaltherapy.net
215.432.1211