

And the  
*Living*

shall take to

# heart

- Ecclesiastics, 7:2



**LIFE SKILLS**

A Project of the Meaningful Life Center



# The Soul

never dies  
- *The Rebbe*

In 1950, after the passing of his predecessor and father-in-law, the Lubavitcher Rebbe emphasized that it was important not to eulogize the deceased, but to let their good deeds speak for them.

Citing a letter that his father-in-law wrote in 1920, after the passing of his own father, the Rebbe explained that a true leader is like a shepherd who never abandons his flock, leaving behind a philosophy and a clear course of action. Indeed, he explained, "he is even more present than during his lifetime, since his soul is freed from the physical constraints of time and space.

## What is a yahrzeit?

Most people think of life as nothing more than a state in which the human body is biologically active. But it is time to ask ourselves: What happens after death, if anything? What does death really mean?

The mystery of death is part of the enigma of the soul and of life itself; understanding death really means understanding life. During life as we know it, the body is vitalized by the soul; upon death, there is a separation between body and soul. But the soul continues to live on as it always has, now unfettered by the physical constraints of the body. And since a person's true character -- his goodness, virtue, and selflessness -- lies in the soul, it is logical to assume that he will ascend to a higher state after fulfilling his responsibilities on Earth.

Modern physics has taught us that no substance truly disappears, that it only changes form. A tree, for instance, might be cut down and used to build a house, or a table, or a chair. Regardless of how the form changes, the wood remains wood. And when that same wood is burned in a furnace, it again changes form, becoming an energy that gives off heat and gas. The tree, the chair, and the fire are all merely different forms of the same substance.

If this is the case with a material substance, it is even more so with a spiritual substance. The spiritual life force in man, the soul, never disappears; upon death, it simply changes from one form to another, higher form. This may be difficult to comprehend at first, since we are so dependent on using our sensory tools to get through life. With wood, for example, it is easier to hold a chair in our hands than to hold fire;

and yet, anyone who has ever seen or felt a fire cannot doubt for a moment that it exists.

No matter what physical ailments might befall a person, they are just that: physical ailments. Nothing that happens to the flesh and blood diminishes in any way the soul's power, which is purely spiritual. It is inappropriate, therefore, to use the term "afterlife" to define what happens after death. "Afterlife" implies that we have entered another, separate place, whereas death is actually a continuation of life as we know it, only in a new, higher form. The chapter in Genesis discussing the death of Sarah, for instance, is called "The Life of Sarah." The chapter discussing the death of Jacob is called "And Jacob Lived." How odd it now seems to name death "Life"!

So before we can truly answer the question "What is death?" we must first ask, "What is life?" By medical definition, life takes place when one's brain and heart are functioning. Yet a person can be biologically alive but not alive at all; breathing and walking and talking are only the manifestations of what we call life. The true source of life, the energy that allows the body to function, is the soul. And the soul, because it is connected to G-d, the giver of life, is immortal. While the manifestations of life may cease upon death, the soul lives on, only in a different form.

How can a mortal human being connect to eternal life? By living a material life that fuses body and soul, thereby connecting to G-d. A person who transforms his or her body into a vehicle for love and generosity is a person who nurtures his or her eternal soul. It is by giving life to others that one becomes truly alive.

To a person for whom life consists of material gains, death indeed represents the end. It is the time when fleeting achievements come to a halt. But to a person for whom life consists of spiritual gains, life never ends. The soul is fueled by the inexhaustible energy of the good deeds a person performed on Earth, and it lives on materially through his or her children and the others who perpetuate his or her spiritual vitality. As the sages say, "Just as his descendants are alive, he, too, is alive"

We often have a hard time distinguishing between biological life and spiritual life, or true life. We are distracted by the many material trappings of biological life. Once the soul leaves the body, though, we can clearly see how it lives on, how that soul inspires people to perform good deeds, to educate and help others, to live G-dly and spiritual lives. It is when a righteous person physically departs the Earth that he or she begins to exert the most profound influence.

Because time is like a spiral, the same energy that G-d invested in your loved one when they passed away, repeats itself on the *yahrzeit* each year. On that day each year the soul begins a new leg of its journey and elevation to a higher level.

## Why do we honor it?

As the soul elevates to the next level of its journey, this elevation has an impact below on the children and family of the soul living on earth. By honoring this day with spiritual activity, we connect to the soul in its flight. Think of a spacecraft flying ever higher, and seemingly further away from us on earth. By connecting to the craft – via communications or camera visuals which the craft sends back to earth – we can see and relate to the cosmos that the spacecraft is experiencing in the heavens. When we connect and commit to the soaring soul, and build and create good things on earth, we in effect manifest the soul's flight and give it a grounding body – a living monument channeling the soul into our lives below.

If the desire to give to the one who has passed on is what impels us to learn something we would not have otherwise learned, to do a *mitzvah* we otherwise would not have done, to go higher and further than we would have otherwise gone, then this soul lives in us. Our hands and feet, mind and heart and mouth become the hands, feet, mind, heart and mouth of the departed soul.



## What does honoring it mean for me and my family?

While a *yahrzeit* represents the soul's elevation to a higher level, it nevertheless remains a painful experience for the survivors. At the same time, it must serve – as must all experiences in life – as a lesson. We must see death not as a negative force, but as an opportunity for growth.

Since a *yahrzeit* provokes such strong emotions, we must have a clear channel through which to express them in a constructive way. Feelings are feelings, but we can choose whether to experience them in a destructive or productive light. The key in this case is to understand death for what it is, to celebrate its positive element: On the *yahrzeit* of a loved one we must realize that his or her soul has now reached an even greater place than it occupied during its time on Earth, and that it will continue to rise.

Because the strongest bond between a mother and daughter or a husband and wife is a spiritual one, it remains strong after death. The soul of a departed person, eternal and intact, watches over the people with whom she was close. Every gracious act gives her great pleasure and satisfaction, particularly when such acts are committed in a manner that she taught, whether by instruction or example.

Her soul is fully aware of what is happening to the friends and relatives she has left behind. The soul is distressed when they experience undue grief or depression, and it rejoices when they move beyond their initial pain and continue to build their lives and inspire those around them.

There is no way to replace a departed loved one, for each person is a complete world. But there is a way to help fill the void. When family and friends supplement their customary good deeds with further virtuous acts on behalf of the departed, they continue the work of his or her soul. By performing such acts in the memory of a loved one, we can truly build a living memorial.

## How do we honor it?

- 1 **Recite** mourner's Kaddish.
- 2 **Give** additional charity, particularly increase your contribution to charity before morning and afternoon services. Initiate a new good activity.
- 3 **Study** extra Torah – an extra lesson in revealed Torah and esoteric teachings (Chassidus), in addition to your regular, daily study periods.
- 4 **Learn** the Mishna (same letters as *neshomo*) with the letters of the departed's name.
- 5 **Recite** Psalm 119 corresponding to the Hebrew letters of the person's name.
- 6 **Take** upon yourself a new resolution or project.
- 7 **Visit** the gravesite if possible.
- 8 **Have** a gathering with family and friends, in honor of the *yahrzeit* of your loved one.
- 9 **Light** a *Yahrzeit* candle, a special memorial candle that burns for 24 hours.

*Everything that you do on the day of the *yahrzeit* of a loved one, should be done with the intention that it be *l'ilui nishmat*, for the sake of the "elevation of the soul".*



Elevate the **SOUL** of your loved one through linking their Yahrzeit to the merit of teaching and inspiring thousands of men and women. To do so please visit [www.meaningfullife.com/sponsor](http://www.meaningfullife.com/sponsor) or call 1.800.3MEANING.

Sponsor

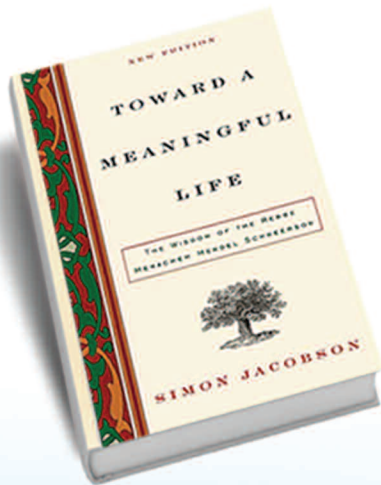
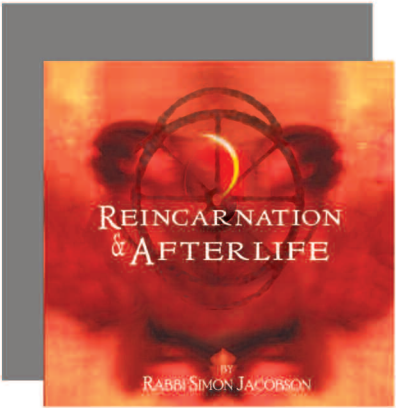
## Reincarnation and Afterlife Series

2-part webinar

- Where does the soul reside before and after life on Earth?
- What type of existence does the soul have in the afterlife?
- Do we meet our families and friends there?
- Are we reincarnations of previous lives?
- Will we reincarnate in future lives?
- What memories do our souls carry?

*Explore the rarely discussed topic of Reincarnation and Afterlife and uncover mysteries of the soul's fascinating journey.*

Buy Now



## Toward a Meaningful Life

A road map for living offering fresh perspectives on every aspect of life; from birth to death, youth to old age; marriage, love, intimacy, and family, the persistent issues of career, health, pain and suffering, education, faith and science. Published by William Morrow.

Buy Now

Learn more about living a Meaningful Life visit [meaningfullife.com](http://meaningfullife.com) - your online spiritual health center.

## LIFE SKILLS

This Life Skills Kit is one of many tools prepared by the Meaningful Life Center, dedicated to offering you a blueprint for life through live and online programs and wide variety of life skill materials such as this. Please accept this kit as our gift to you. Share this knowledge with others, become a partner, a leader. Your tax-deductable donation will help us continue creating and sharing these invaluable teachings.